Margaret Wentworth Owings Oral History

The Margaret Wentworth Owings oral history memoir, Artist, and Wildlife and Environmental Defender (1991), exemplifies the strength of the oral history approach in revealing personal influences, motivation, and values. Throughout its pages the questions are put or implied: Who is this person and why is she working so hard? What turns deep concern into action? How do things get done? The insights of this oral history breathe life into The Bancroft Library’s cartons and boxes of Owings letters, scrapbooks, and speeches on preservation causes and crises.

When Margaret Owings began giving her papers to the Manuscripts Division of The Bancroft Library in 1985, this remarkably complex and accomplished woman was concerned that the collection, with its emphasis on environmental work, would overshadow the artist in her, the part that provided the vision of how things could ideally be. When she accepted the invitation of the Regional Oral History Office to do an oral history it was with the assurance that she would be seen as artist as well as advocate.

Born to parents with deep New England roots, Margaret Wentworth grew up in Berkeley, in a house that was "nestled among enormous rocks and marvelous live oaks, with their elbows down on the ground and resting on the rocks." She thinks back to it as "intimate beauty." For all her family connections to the East Coast, her devotion to the western trees, mountains, and sea is in her bones, as is the stewardship of the land. Her father, Frank W. Wentworth, was the treasurer of the Save-the-Redwoods League. Margaret became a champion of the redwoods too.

Before she took on the preservation issues that she is well known for, Margaret Wentworth studied art at Mills College, where she was influenced by the work of etcher Roi Partridge. Study with Chiura Obata at Berkeley "taught me the freedom of the line," she says, and graduate work at Harvard’s Fogg Museum School gave a solid foundation to her natural aesthetic response to the shapes and colors of her world. After a year of work in San Francisco, marriage in 1937 took her to Chicago for ten years. There her longing for the West grew, barely assuaged by trips to the Carmel area and by time spent creating illustrations for a book of John Muir’s work. When she and her first husband Malcolm Millard moved to Carmel it was like coming home.

In 1953, Margaret married Nathaniel Owings, partner in the architectural firm of Skid-
more, Owings, and Merrill. Together they built a life revolving around Big Sur and New Mexico. In answer to a question in the oral history about creating a house with her architect husband, she said that together they designed "Wild Bird," the aerie in Big Sur at Grimes Point, and the adobe compound in Jacona, outside Santa Fe. "We did everything on the Jacona ranch together." She talks revealingly about her relationship with Owings. He was steady, building me up...Standing behind me...He got me into doing things much bigger than myself.

She was ready, then, in 1959, when the sea lions beneath the Owings home on Grimes Point, and all along the California coast, were threatened with a legalized mass slaughter. Margaret Owings put together a committee of sea lion defenders that included Nicholas Roosevelt, Starker Leopold, Ansel Adams, Laurance Rockefeller, Samuel F. B. Morse. She found a lobbyist, she used the newspapers, and visual material to develop public support. On the scene and behind the scene, she used her considerable charm, impressive connections, and great sense of humor.

A recurrent theme of this oral history is the power of the word. For Margaret Owings there is nothing trivial about how one puts things, what word is chosen, and how it is emphasized. She believes and has demonstrated that with the right word at the right time, people will be convinced. She opened a speech at a 1965 Wilderness Conference sponsored by the Sierra Club with: "These two days - we have been turning over in our hands - A GREAT ROUGH ROCK - with many faults. It is a TREASURED ROCK. We call it "WILDERNESS." The emphases, in her speech notes, bring great impact to a simple statement.

The oral history memoir gives a profound sense of a person who has always been hungry for the beauty of language, nature, and art. The list of writers and artists she loves and discusses is headed by Freya Stark, Isak Dinesen, Sigurd Olson, Loren Eiseley. She quotes from Muir, Piatt, Joss, Menninger, An undervor Post, Rilke, Meeting Rachel Carson and Henry Moore, befriending Georgia O'Keeffe, Wallace and Mary Stegner, and Robert Redford, working with fellow stewards of wildlife, these were profound moments for Margaret Owings. Her letters to and from friends in The Bancroft Collection and her words in the oral history remind us how much Margaret Owings has accomplished by gentle persuasion and informed advocacy, and by inspiring others with her own deeply felt devotion to the natural world.

Suzanne Ries
Ann Lage

Huck Finn Manuscript

The disputed ownership of the new manuscript of Huckleberry Finn has now been resolved, and immediate access to it has been obtained by the Mark Twain Project. The newly discovered half of the manuscript is now owned by the Buffalo and Erie County Public Library, which has long housed the other half (Mark Twain gave both halves to the Library in 1885-87). (See Bancroftiana no. 102 for an account of the history and recovery of the manuscript.) A Xerox copy of the rediscovered half has been deposited with the Mark Twain Project, which is making plans for a revised edition of Huckleberry Finn to be published no later - and no sooner - than the Fall of 1997.

The suit and counter-suit over the rightful ownership of the manuscript, which might otherwise have dragged on for years, was resolved not by a court, but by a unique legal agreement among the four interested parties: the Gluck family (which found and claimed to own the manuscript); the Buffalo Library (which claimed ownership by virtue of Mark Twain's original gift); the Mark Twain Foundation (which owns the copyright on all unpublished parts of the manuscript); and the Regents of the University of California for the University of California Press (which has, by contract with the Foundation, the exclusive right to publish Mark Twain's unpublished works).

In essence, the bargain struck by these parties gave immediate access to and ownership of the manuscript to Buffalo in return for a window of opportunity whereby the Gluck family and the Mark Twain Foundation enjoy the exclusive right to publish or otherwise exploit the new manuscript until at least 1997. This gives them the right to publish a complete facsimile of the handwritten document, and a complete transcription of it, thereby providing access to Mark Twain's first draft of his famous novel. By the terms of this agreement (and barring further negotiations) only in 1997 will the University of California Press be allowed to exercise its right to publish a new edition based on the new manuscript material.

As readers of Bancroftiana may recall, the staff of the Mark Twain Project played a crucial role in how the new manuscript was treated after its discovery in 1991. It was through Bancroft's Mark Twain Papers and the Project's expertise that it became known exactly what Mark Twain had done with his manuscript in the first place. The prospect of drawing on this uniquely valuable document for a revised edition of Huckleberry Finn is indeed exciting. The Mark Twain Project, however, is at a crucial juncture in its own history, which will have a direct bearing on this prospect.

For many years, now, The Friends of The Bancroft Library have provided the primary support for funds matched by the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH). Support from the Friends remains crucial in the coming years, but the Council of the Friends, the NEH, and the University Administration have all urged that more broadly based support is essential for the Project. All recognize that the Mark Twain edition is of national significance and ought to have national support. On that assumption, during the next few months, Project staff will be actively exploring new sources of funding well beyond the region of Northern California.

The editorial and technical expertise of the Mark Twain Project is so highly regarded that without it few scholars are likely to undertake the demanding task of deciding what changes in the Project's 1985 text are called for by the new material. We anticipate that preparation of a new edition of Huckleberry Finn completed by the Project may well yield work that the University of California Press can successfully license world-wide, or even publish itself as a mass-
market paperback, a step that has long been urged by The Friends. Income from the rights to such a definitive text of Huck Finn might prove substantial, and if so, would greatly assist The Friends of The Bancroft Library in their continued efforts to fund the Mark Twain Project to completion.

Robert H. Hirst

Heralding the inexhaustible future market for women’s advice books, this anonymous pamphlet joins another marriage book on our shelves, Oh zu nemen ein echth Weib [On Whether a Man should Take a Wife], also printed in Augsburg a few years earlier (1537), but written in a very different style. The author, Albrecht von Eyb, once a chamberlain for Pope Pius II, shows off his wit and classical learning in arguing that marriage is a Christian duty. Slim enough to fit into the household Bible for ready reference, the Frauen Biechlin may have been intended for the “pater familias” who felt the need to call upon higher authority to make his case in front of a strong-willed wife. As the author explains on the title page, the text has been gathered from the Holy Word of God and written according to it. Although the booklet begins with praise and Bible quotations for the virtuous, it has a lot more to say about the dire consequences for the wicked, i.e. disobedient daughters of Eve. For “a woman brought sin into the world from which we all die,” reads the last chapter heading, citing Genesis. A cantankerous wife is a stony street for the tired old feet of a mild and peaceful man, and a woman who rules disguised her husband; that’s how it has always been, the author goes on. Judging from his repeated insistence on the God-given right of a husband to rule over his wife, one can surmise that some early modern women were reluctant to submit to this higher authority.

Whatever disputes the protestant reformers had among each other or with the Catholic Church, they propagated the same dogma on women’s role. For women were controlled by their husbands, i.e. disobedient daughters of Eve. For “a woman brought sin into the world from which we all die,” reads the last chapter heading, citing Genesis. A cantankerous wife is a stony street for the tired old feet of a mild and peaceful man, and a woman who rules disguised her husband; that’s how it has always been, the author goes on. Judging from his repeated insistence on the God-given right of a husband to rule over his wife, one can surmise that some early modern women were reluctant to submit to this higher authority. Whatever disputes the protestant reformers had among each other or with the Catholic Church, they propagated the same dogma on women’s role. For women were controlled by their husbands, i.e. disobedient daughters of Eve. For “a woman brought sin into the world from which we all die,” reads the last chapter heading, citing Genesis. A cantankerous wife is a stony street for the tired old feet of a mild and peaceful man, and a woman who rules disguised her husband; that’s how it has always been, the author goes on. Judging from his repeated insistence on the God-given right of a husband to rule over his wife, one can surmise that some early modern women were reluctant to submit to this higher authority.

That women are strong and capable of conducting their own affairs is the message of Le Livre de la Femme Forte et Vertueuse [The Book of the Strong and Virtuous Woman], by François Le Roy, who belonged to the Order of Fontevraud at the turn of the 14th century. The first edition came out in 1521 (no earlier date is known), but for its time it must have been a best seller having reached several printings by 1530. The recently acquired Bancroft copy, published in Paris by Jean Petit in about 1537, seems to be one of only three copies in existence. Writing in the vernacular rather than in Latin, the author testifies that women can do anything they set out to do in the service of Christ. Founded in 1100, the order of Fontevraud included men and women who dedicated themselves to labor, prayer and an ascetic life. The women lived by themselves in silence, except when their work required contact with the outside world. Abbesses administered the convent with unusual autonomy as prescribed by the rules of its founder. Le Roy is obviously familiar with the work of the sisters who ran a 120-bed leper hospital and a rehabilitation program for “fallen” women. Drawing on their example he advises women to gain self-reliance and practical knowledge in running a family, a business, or planting a vineyard, encouraging them to take on hardships because their strength will grow with their faith in God and their dedication to serving mankind.

Although convents continued to provide the opportunity for spiritual and intellectual growth for women of privilege, their appeal decreased with each passing century. On the other hand, with the age of enlightenment, the literary salon offered to a select circle of highly educated women a new venue for communicating not only with each other, but also with men - philosophers, poets, politicians who had contact with the real world. The Marquise de Rambouillet, wealthy by birth and marriage, managed to create for herself an independent style of courtly life, free of the scandal and frivolity associated with Parisian aristocracy. Chastity became one of the requirements of ideal love which proved popular with the ladies, because it did not result in pregnancy. The Marquise had developed a mysterious illness after the birth of her seventh child from 1623 until her death in 1665, received guests from her bed in a salon designed especially for the purpose.

Nicholas Dupuy’s Dialogues sur les Plaisirs, sur les Passions, sur le Mêrèdes Femmes, et sur leur Sensibilité pour l’Honneur ... (Paris, 1777) represents the kind of intellectual conversation that may have ideally taken place in the Salon Rambouillet or its successors. The book is dedicated to “Madame” with a long preface indicating that the author had Madame de Maintenon in mind as the ideal of the educator-moralizer who tries to persuade her younger and frivolous conversation partner.
that true love is unworthy of passion and lust.

First mistress, then morganatic wife of Louis XIV, the Madame de Maintenon was a devout Catholic known for her efforts to raise the moral tone of the court. Having educated the king's children, she founded a school for the daughters of poor noble families and wrote a number of essays and letters on the subject of women's activities. The details counterbalance the work of a woman historian, the given author. Although the title Female Revolutionary Plutarch suggests the work of a woman historian, the given author was probably one, as Lewis Goldsmith, a British journalist. He witnessed the French Revolution first as a sympathizer, but soon became vitriolically anti-Republican and anti-Napoleon. This did not prevent him from writing a most unflattering portrayal of Madame de Stael. Agreeing with Voltaire that "an idiot wife is preferable to a philosophical one," he depicts her as an overbearing intrigant, because she did not lend her support to Marie Antoinette, the late Queen of France, to whose memory the work is dedicated. As promised by the subtitle, the three volumes of The Female Revolutionary Plutarch contain biographical, historical, and revolutionary sketches, characters, and anecdotes about well known women, with the emphasis on anecdotes. One about Madame de Stael, for instance, tells that she put her husband to sleep on their wedding night lecturing on the reproductive organs of the female physique. There are many concerning the love affairs and gambling habits of Josephine Bonaparte, who had a set price for each office: "Never a princess or a favorite mistress of a sovereign existed who was so eager to seize all this and to obtain everything as the Empress Josephine," concludes the author.

Josephine Dessalines, the revolutionary Empress of Haiti is given a more sympathetic treatment. A former slave, this daughter of an African mother and European father was bought by a "French negro-driver" and eventually became the consort of the self-crowned Black emperor, Jacques Dessalines, "deservedly esteemed by him as a trusty friend and a faithful wife, and beloved by his subjects as a good and kind sovereign." Resembling the gossip columns in today's tabloid press, these stories offer a wealth of authentic details about women's activities. The details counterbalance the author's bias, demonstrating that these obstreperous women were more than a stony street for tired old feet.

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**Drake's Plate on Loan**

For the first time, the Library has consented to loan the Drake Plate for exhibition. Not that it had to travel very far: until March 21, 1993, the Phoebe Hearst Museum is the place to go. Bancroft staff have long been convinced that the plate is not a genuine artifact left during Drake's 1579 visit. James D. Hart concluded his statement on the authenticity of the plate by saying, "Scientific studies have shown that what was thought to be an ancient artifact is evidently but a modern creation, yet they have left unanswered the intriguing questions about who made it and why."

The exhibit doesn't answer those last two questions either, but if you feel you must see Drake's plate between now and the next equinox, the Phoebe Hearst Museum is the place to go.

**Bancroft and the Budget**

The news of California's budget problems is not greatly exaggerated, but only now is the first impact on Bancroft of this year's state budget crisis becoming clear. Bancroft has seen the early retirement of the senior Bancroft Collection cataloger, Soledad Fernandez, and of the Curator of Pictorial Collections, Lawrence Dinnean. In addition, several staff have taken advantage of the opportunity voluntarily to reduce their work hours. Probably the severest immediate impact, however, has been on our fund for student library employees who serve as a pages, stack maintenance personnel, clerical and processing staff. We were directed to protect all salaried positions while cutting 5% from last year's operations budget. This necessarily reduced the funding for student employees. The Library Administrative Group provided us with slightly more money for that line of our budget, but because the campus administration has requested that all libraries maintain their present public service hours, Bancroft has had to reassign career staff to public service duties, thereby further reducing general productivity.

These budget pressures — which we realize are hitting other parts of the University even more heavily — are forcing Bancroft to analyze its operations and adjust work assignments to adapt to the reduced level of staffing. Operating, as we did for nearly all of last year in what was termed an "interim" mode, did not provide the opportunity to plan for major changes in function. For that reason, I was willing to become Acting Director this past April, when it became clear that our first search for a Director had not produced one.
During the summer, Bancroft embarked on a series of operational reviews conducted by a committee of outside consultants and Berkeley representatives. These reviews would almost certainly have been undertaken under a newly appointed Director under any circumstances, but in the present climate, with the impending loss of additional staff, the studies were essential.

The reviewers' recommendations about our general operations are now being analyzed by Bancroft staff. Many of the committee's proposals stemmed directly from their discussions with Bancrofters, so in most areas the suggestions for change and redirection reflect our own understanding and thinking of recent years. We are generally in good stead with re­

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It is time to recognize some of the people and organizations who have contributed to The Bancroft Library in the past fiscal year. The following list includes donors of library materials as well as those who have given direct financial support. The students, faculty, and staff of the Berkeley campus all join in expressing their gratitude to those who have aided Bancroft this year.

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Wilshire’s Magazine. Los Angeles: 1900-1903. (Bancroft has no. 17 only).


Paul Laurence Dunbar, Poet Laureate of the Negro Race. Philadelphia: R.C. Ransom, 19—.


Alcott, Louisa May. Little Women, or, Meg, Jo, Beth and Amy. Boston: Roberts Brothers, 1868-1869. 2 vols. (Bancroft has v. 2 only).


