Seehofs donate Elizabethan collection

They clearly weren’t peasants, but neither would they be mistaken for Royalty. Her stunning floor-length velvet gown, elegantly adorned with hand-sewn faux pearls and filigree trim, her hair capped with a snood, and his velvet breeches, jerkin, hat and boots identified Jean and Tom Seehof as members of the Nobility. Says Tom, “…anyone on a London street during the Tudor period would immediately have recognized our societal station and status,” so strict were the sumptuary laws, or dress codes, of Elizabethan England.

But, the Seehofs were not in London and most certainly not in the Elizabethan Era. The feast of which they were partaking was indeed typical of Tudor England—bread, wine, meat; lots of meat—but it was March 2006 and the banquet hall was the University Club’s Orange Grove Bistro. The dinner, says Cindy Ventuleth, Library Development Officer, was to honor “…the Seehofs for their donation to the Library of an extensive collection of Elizabethan books, clothing and other memorabilia.” And as is their custom, Tom, Jean and their family came dressed appropriately, in full noble regalia. Minus, says Jean, “…a few of the clothing accoutrements of the time, such as an iron girdle, which I refuse to wear as a concession to 20th century comfort standards.”

The Seehof’s interest in things Elizabethan began innocently enough with a visit in the 1970s to the local Renaissance Faire. “On our first visit we had a good time,” says Tom, but the purchase of a garland for Jean “…seems to have had an almost magical effect. While wearing the garland Jean decided to visit the Faire again, and we did. But this time Jean whipped up some costumes and we went dressed as peasants.” The second visit proved “…a roaring good time” and thereafter for the better part of four decades the couple and their family were yearly fixtures at the Faire, each time dressed in authentic costumes created by Jean. But, peasantry proved a short-lived estate. “Peasants must bow to everyone,” says Tom, “so after our first costume-clad visit we joined the Nobility as Lord Thomas and Lady Henrietta of Woodland. We became upwardly mobile in just seven days!”

Their interest in Tudor England piqued by their visit to the Faire, the Seehofs found themselves launched on an intellectual adventure, collecting and reading book after book about Elizabeth’s England. Rummaging through one bookstore after another on their visits to Europe, over several decades they accumulated a treasure trove of tomes—more than 3000 books in all. “We got a great deal of pleasure from the hunt and we bought whatever books struck our fancy. Jean has a

Jean and Tom Seehof
very good eye for such things, so we acquired a lot of very interesting pieces.” As their personal library became known, their books also found use by friends and by scholars researching the Elizabethan period.

A decision to move from Los Angeles to a home of more modest size forced the Seehofs to consider giving up the assemblage that had brought them so much pleasure. “We wanted the books to be used,” says Tom, “Over the years we had developed a very warm and personal relationship with the folks in the Oviatt Library so it seemed natural to select it as the home for our collection. We knew our books would be appreciated and used there, and just the possibility of future students reading the books, becoming seriously interested in the Elizabethan age and perhaps contributing to a better understanding of that very exciting time has already given us tremendous pleasure!”

Though long-time Friends of the Library members, the Seehofs’ bond with the institution was cemented when Tom enrolled in an Internet Research Methods class taught by Librarian Jack Kranz. Says Kranz, “Tom soaked up all I had to offer with unfailing interest and vigor, and later indicated that the class had made a major difference in his ability to gather information, one of his many intellectual vocations.”

The Library, not surprisingly, was delighted to receive the Seehofs’ astonishing collection. Says Tony Gardner, Curator of Special Collections, “Many of the older or more unusual books will go into Special Collections where they’ll be available to scholars. The remainder will be put into circulation.” But, says Ventuleth, “Every one of the books will have a book plate indicating it was gifted by the Seehofs.”

Among the books already destined for Special Collections are a hand-pressed 1823 edition of “Memoirs of the Court of Queen Elizabeth” by Lucy Aikin, and Sir Robert Naunton’s 1824 publication of “Memoirs of Elizabeth, her Court and Favourites.” Also in the Special Collection is “Diary of Henry MacHyn,” published in 1847, in the original publisher’s binding and, reflecting a perpetual interest in the preeminent Elizabethan playwright, a 1910 edition of “Bacon is Shake-Speare” by Sir Edwin Durning-Laurence, complete with plates made from wood engravings.

Although books comprise the bulk of the Seehof collection, also among the donated items are several collector costume dolls outfitted in appropriate attire. Among the dolls are a Brenda Price original of Queen Elizabeth I dressed as she was in the famous Armada portrait painted to celebrate England’s 1588 victory over Spain; several historically accurate Peggy Nisbet models; and a hand-painted representation of William Shakespeare. Rounding out the collection is an assortment of household goods of the sort typically used in Tudor times—silver goblets, china, spoons, and thimbles—plus several of the costumes Jean so carefully sewed for the family’s Renaissance excursions. To facilitate the collection’s maintenance the Seehofs also made a substantial monetary contribution.

“Making the collection was such a pleasure,” says Tom, “that we have already started another.” In her thanks to the Seehofs for their donation Library Dean Sue Curzon indicated “Their gift is a great addition for the Library, making available to students and scholars many works that we previously didn’t have. We are so grateful to Jean and Tom for their generosity.”

—jd
Virginia Elwood, Martha and Gerry Robinson Honored

At a well-attended celebratory luncheon on November 9 Dean Sue Curzon acknowledged the Library’s receipt of two major gifts. Joining her in honoring the donors—two long-time Library employees, Virginia Elwood and Martha Robinson, and Martha’s husband, Gerry—were more than 65 family, friends, and colleagues.

Elwood, a CSUN librarian from 1972 until she retired in 2001, had an insatiable curiosity about and felicity for “…Women’s Studies…intellectual freedom…(and) history, particularly Los Angeles history,” said Curzon. Elwood played a seminal role in developing and preserving the University’s archives which she “…oversaw with a single-minded devotion. And here we are, two years shy of our 50th anniversary, and it is Virginia’s exceptional legacy that enables the University to understand its own past as it frames its future.” In her retirement Elwood is writing a book about Caroline Severance, an important women’s rights activist and social reformer.

In her twenty-five years at the Oviatt Martha Robinson worked as the Library Assistant for government documents, while also taking classes in leisure studies and recreation at CSUN. Reflecting this interest, “…both she and Gerry are amateur clowns who volunteer their services at numerous events.” Says Curzon, “Martha is the only person I have ever known with a commendation in her file for being a clown.”

While working on her Master’s degree Martha was recognized in 1988 as the Department of Leisure Studies and Recreation’s Outstanding Graduate Student.

The Robinsons’ contribution will allow the addition of Library resources related to leisure studies and recreation; Elwood’s gift will benefit the University Archives. In offering her appreciation to the honorees, Curzon noted that “Virginia, Martha and Gerry have given gifts that will provide students and faculty greater access to vital resources. Accessing information is the Library’s mission so these gifts are truly close to our hearts and very much appreciated.”

—jd

June Frankenberg - Volunteer of the Year

On November 17 our own June Frankenberg was honored at the University’s Fifth Annual Volunteer Service Awards ceremony for her loyal and dedicated service on the Friends of the Library Board of Directors. June was the organization’s president for three years and currently co-chairs the group’s Program Committee, the body responsible for arranging tours, speakers, book signings and other events for the Library and for the University. Moreover, since the Friends Bookstore first opened six years ago she has been a weekly volunteer, spending her time there organizing, pricing and selling donated books.

Born in New York, June moved to Los Angeles with her family when she was twelve. After graduating from Fairfax High she attended UCLA, ultimately receiving her degree in education. For 30 years she taught grade five, mostly at Glenwood School in Sun Valley, and loved doing so. Though now retired she often runs into her former students, all of whom are very happy to say hello to "Mrs. Frankenberg." June and her husband Herb, to whom she has been married for 49 years, love spending time with their two children and five grandchildren. But June also values being a part of the Friends of the Library, a group she considers a major asset to the University.
They are the Library's patron-greeters—it's welcome mat, as it were—offering to all who enter a kaleidoscope of vicarious adventure. And those who succumb to their allure invariably are rewarded with a new perspective, a nugget of knowledge, an indelible impression. I refer, of course, to the lobby's ever-changing exhibits, perhaps the Library's most conspicuous, yet least touted, outreach efforts. For readers who missed them, I offer a commentary on the lobby's three most recent exhibitions, each one a delightful titillation of the intellect.

Kites: Soaring among the clouds (May 20 – July 10): Devoted to one of the world's simplest yet most enduring inventions, for me this exhibit was a childhood-recalling tour de force. Prominently showcased was an eye-catching assortment of mini-kites beautifully constructed from leaves, paper, silk, bamboo, even plastic and fiberglass, some resembling butterflies and as small and as delicate as the real thing. Peering into an adjoining case I found myself chuckling over an assemblage of humorous ornaments featuring kite-connected personages, among them Winnie the Pooh and Piglet, and Charlie Brown and his famous nemesis, the “kite-eating tree.” But front and center were depictions of myriad kite forms. Shown along with familiar box-, delta- and diamond-shaped kites was a flying octopus, a feathered banner, stunt kites designed for speed or aerial maneuvering, and contest kites with glass-impregnated strings used to cut the lines on opponent's kites.

But I also found myself entranced by an abundance of fascinating facts about the history, cultural importance and utility of these aerial acrobats. Though I was aware that Marco Polo introduced kites, a Chinese invention, to Europe in the 13th century, I had not realized that for some Peoples kites are important cultural and religious symbols. Moreover, I learned that kites are not simply aerial playthings but have been used to solve real-life problems. Benjamin Franklin's use of a kite as a scientific tool is common knowledge, but I was previously unaware of the kite's role in the Wright Brothers's investigations into the physics of flight. I was intrigued to discover that kites have been used in warfare—for enemy observation, aerial photography, signaling, or by one Chinese general for measuring the distance required to tunnel beneath a city's wall. But my least expected finding was that kites had been used to propel boats, buggies, skateboards, water-skis and sleds—as recently as 1999 kites pulled an expedition's sleds to the North Pole.

Though already familiar with kites as toys, I found myself grateful to Gina Hsiung, creator of the exhibit, for opening for me an entirely new dimension of these aerial gymnasts.

Santa Monica Mountains: A jewel within (August 21 – September 28): Spotlighting the ecosystems, wildlife and history of the largest urban park in the United States—the Santa Monica Mountains National Recreation Area—this exhibit brought the outdoors to the Library's foyer. According to Dean Arnold, Music and Media Supervisor, who together with Stephanie Ballard curated it, the exhibit's intent was to raise visitors' awareness and appreciation for “the wonderful resource we have in our own backyard,” a portion of which can be seen from the Library's windows. “People don't realize that there are year-round streams with waterfalls and wonderful places for reflection, all right in the middle of Los Angeles.” In raising awareness, Arnold and Ballard's effort was surely a success!

A biologist by training, this exhibit was for me an immediate attention grabber. Throughout the lobby stood a host of wildlife specimens—brown bear, bobcat, raccoon, quail, great-horned owl, acorn woodpeckers—stuffed and mounted in life-like poses, some in simulated natural settings, all of them accompanied by informative snippets about their habitats and behavior. I was intrigued by a display devoted to one of the Santa Monica Mountain's top predators—mountain lions, or pumas—that showed how scientists use electronic collars to monitor the movements of these magnificent beasts, and explained the importance of sub-roadway culverts in limiting highway mortality. But the area's past denizens were not overlooked, for also on show was a beautiful assortment of fossils from the oceans that once covered this region stretching from Griffith Park to Point Mugu. And for those inclined to take just a few extra moments, detailed information about the areas ecosystems—oak woodland, chaparral, coastal sage scrub, and the like—was continuously offered via a looping video.

Although wildlife took center stage, the exhibit also prominently featured human use of the Santa Monica Mountains. Neatly arrayed among artifacts of the area's earliest inhabitants, the Chumash, were descriptions of the group's vibrant society, its utilization of the area's resources, and its ultimate demise. But as an avid hiker, I particularly appreciated the display's focus on modern trails, principal among them the 65-mile-long Backbone Trail. Constructed by volunteers, the California Conservation Corps and the staff of many parkland agencies, this footpath now offers mountain wanderers both spectacular views and serene refuges.

But no presentation on our local mountains would be
complete that did not pay homage to Susan B. Nelson and Marge Feinberg. This exhibit did not disappoint, for both visionaries were amply and appropriately acknowledged. Often referred to as the “Mother of the Santa Monica Mountains,” Nelson led the fight to create the National Recreation Area. Without her activism, dedication and willingness to aggressively challenge local, state and national politicians it is doubtful that the park and its trails would now exist. Following in her footsteps with equal zeal was Marge Feinberg, one of this University’s own graduate students, who dreamed of a hiking trail completely encircling the San Fernando Valley. Though she didn’t live to see her dream a reality, the premiere section of the Rim of the Valley Trail that she envisioned and initially blazed was dedicated and opened to the region’s hikers in 2003.

An exhibit of this complexity requires the efforts of many. Among those whose contributions made it possible were the University’s Departments of Biology, Geological Sciences and Geography; the National Park Service; Malibu Creek State Park; the Natural History Museum of Los Angeles County; Green Thumb Nursery, Canoga Park; and Tom Gamache, nature photographer.

History through Deaf eyes (October 4 – November 8): Gallaudet University developed this series of informative plaques and photos to inform the public about the deaf (people with hearing loss) and the Deaf (people who identify themselves as members of the Deaf Culture), and to illuminate the historical linkage between the hearing majority and the deaf minority.

Because of the prominence of sign language used at CSUN, my attention was quickly focused on the historical conflict that has raged between “oralists” and “signers.” Whereas oralists see lip reading and vocalizing as a way for the deaf to be assimilated into a hearing world, thus limiting their isolation, “signers” view hand signaling as the “natural language of the deaf,” a critical means for maintaining a vibrant Deaf community. I was surprised to find that Alexander Graham Bell, whose mother was hard of hearing, stood out among the early oralists. Indeed, his strong interest in the physiology of articulation and his unrelenting focus on lip reading and vocalization proved instrumental in changing the way many deaf children were taught. But signers proved equally adamant in the use of sign language. In the early 1800s, American Sign Language (ASL) came into existence from signs and sign languages used elsewhere, most prominently among Paris’s Deaf community. Thomas Hopkins Gallaudet, a Congregational minister, became acquainted with sign language through his working relationship with Laurent Clerc, a deaf Frenchman in Hartford, Connecticut. It wasn’t until the 1960s, I found out, that ASL was finally recognized as a true language and a registry of interpreters for the deaf was established. In this regard, CSUN was at the forefront.

From the exhibit, I also became aware of Ernest Marshall, a third generation member of a deaf family and an influential Deaf filmmaker. Renowned among the Deaf community for his acting ability and his mastery of sign language, Marshall began producing entertainment films for the Deaf in the 1930s, and for more than 30 years traveled throughout the country showing them. Until captioning was added to film in the late 1960s, Marshall’s movies were in high demand. One of his last trips, in 1967, saw him trekking more than 9000 miles by train, his expenses paid entirely from ticket sales.

If you missed this exhibit, don’t despair, for it is a mere preview of a film and a book scheduled for release in spring 2007. Watch for them. With support from the CSUN Department of Deaf Studies and the National Center on Deafness, Larry Fleischer and Genie Gertz were the exhibit’s curators. Mara Houdyshell, a CSUN Reference librarian, coordinated the Oviatt Library’s showing.

—jd
Remarkable Impressions” Opens at Oviatt

In today's digital world, creating an image for publication can be a breeze: Point and shoot; tweak the image a bit with Photoshop; done! But, it wasn't always so easy. This fall, the Oviatt Library honored book illustrators of bygone eras with a display of their works and the methods they used to create them.

On view in the Library's C.K. and Teresa Tseng Gallery until December 22 was an extraordinary assemblage of illustrations—etchings, color engravings, lithographs, and more—from the 18th and 19th century. Says Tony Gardner, the exhibit's architect and Curator of Special Collections, the creative works displayed spanned the “…period of transition from hand-operated to power-operated printing machinery.” Most illustrations on exhibit were from the Library's collections, but several were on loan from Library supporters.

“Highlighting the exhibit,” says Gardner, “are beautiful copperplate engravings by William Hogarth, a 19th century engraver and painter whose realistic depictions of daily life in 18th century England are infused with social commentary.” Principal among them were two sets of six plates each—Harlot's Progress, first printed in 1732, and Rake's Progress, from 1735—depicting in sequence the deprivations that befall a young woman and man as their lives progress. Gardner notes that Hogarth's historical importance extends beyond his art, for attempts to imitate his engravings were met with legal challenges and led ultimately to the first copyright legislation.

Visitors to the exhibition were also treated to such artistic treasures as The Grammar of Ornament by Owen Jones, arguably the most famous book illustrated with chromolithographs, each of its 100 color plates made from six individually prepared lithography stones. Viewers could also feast their eyes on an exquisite 1888 edition of Robert Browning's The Pied Piper of Hamlin, replete with 35 color engravings by Kate Greenaway, and plates from an 1846 wildflower book by Jane Webb Loudon, beautifully illustrated with anatomically accurate color depictions of British flowers. Women visitors might have found themselves drawn to a copy of Godey's Lady's Book, a precursor of today's women's magazines, wherein, alongside poetry, news, clothing patterns, sheet music and child-rearing advice, are marvelous color engravings showing the fashions of the day. Also showcased were prints by such luminaries as George Cruikshank, William Blake, and Honore Daumier, whose illustrations, as was the custom of the 18th and 19th centuries, depict social issues, cautionary tales, satire, politics, fashion or famous stories.

But the illustrations were just part of the exhibit; displays that teach of the artisans' tools and techniques complemented them. We learned, for instance, that the earliest engraving procedure—relief printing—involves the chiseling of a wood block so as to create a raised image onto which ink is spread for transfer to paper. In contrast, a later advance—Intaglio printing—requires the cutting or etching of an image into a metal surface and the transfer of ink caught in the grooves. But we also discover that by the end of the 18th century the method of choice was to draw illustrations onto smooth stone or metal plates with grease pencil and to transfer ink adhering to the waxy lines onto paper—planographic printing. Relief printing, says Gardner, is “…a Chinese invention dating back a thousand years that came into wide use with Johannes Gutenberg's invention of the printing press in the 15th century.” Lithography, the best known of the planographic techniques, proved a major breakthrough for publishers, he notes, because it “…permitted the making of an almost unlimited number of prints.”

The exhibit's official opening on September 19 was marked by a reception for Library supporters and a talk by Gardner on the historic importance of the illustrators and their methodologies. Attending were Harry Stone, a portion of whose Charles Dickens collection was exhibited; Ruth Globerson, donor of many Hogarth prints, including Rake's Progress; and Herbert and Lillian Palmer, donors of a large 1790 book of Hogarth prints of which several were displayed. In her opening remarks, Library Dean Sue Curzon also acknowledged the contributions to the exhibit of Marion Vogler and of Norman and Sivia Mann, none of whom was able to attend, and acknowledged L. Clarice Davis, a former librarian and book dealer, from whose estate several pieces derived. Generous financial support by Gus and Erika Manders made the exhibit possible; the Friends of the Library, a cadre of volunteers, also contributed.

—jd
Library hosts Mars mission talk

Her job is to look for life on Mars! Or stated in more precise scientific terms, the NASA team for which she is Deputy Project Scientist “…seeks evidence, in the form of organic precursors or biochemical signatures,” for current or past life on our planetary neighbor. Thus did Dr. Deborah S. Bass in a Library-sponsored talk characterize the role of the space agency’s next scheduled probe of the red planet, the Phoenix Mars Scout Mission.

Following a repast at the Orange Grove Bistro in June, Bass explained to her well-fed but enthusiastic audience how the Phoenix project would conduct its search for extra-terrestrial life. Since water is life’s key, she said, the mission will explore “…the history of water on Mars and…look for zones where life may have existed.” To this end, the mission targets the planet’s northern polar region where water, in the form of soil ice or permafrost, has previously been found. Although liquid water appears to have once flowed in surface streams and accumulated in shallow lakes, none exists on Mars today. The Martian South Pole, Bass noted, is an unlikely habitat for living things, coated as it is with frozen carbon dioxide, or “dry ice.”

In her provocative talk, Bass explained that the mission, scheduled for launch in August 2007 and a landing in May 2008, is to be an inexpensive trailblazer. To minimize costs, the entire probe is constructed from leftover and duplicate parts from past missions—the landing vehicle a backup for a 1998 Mars Polar Lander that was lost on impact, the instrument payload from a 2001 Mars Surveyor that never got off the ground. Indeed, the project’s name was selected because the probe, much like the mythical Phoenix, “…rises up out of the ashes” of other missions.

According to Bass, after landing and unfurling its power-generating solar panels, the vehicle’s robotic arm will deploy and dig soil samples from as deep as half a meter. Then, using a portable laboratory, the soil samples will be viewed microscopically and subjected to an array of sophisticated chemical, mineralogical and conductivity tests. And all the while, a pair of eyeball-like lenses will send back stereoscopic images of the terrain, and a meteorological package will collect data about the atmosphere, cloud cover, fog and dust.

Though obtaining evidence of Martian life is key, the probe will also allow scientists to characterize the planet’s geology and climate and to identify potential sources of water, two critical preparatory steps for future human explorations. But in a broader sense, the NASA scientist proffers that “…understanding other planets tells us something about our own environment and our planet,” and may prove valuable “…in the development of new technology in many fields, including medicine.”

The Phoenix Scout Mission is a cooperative adventure involving NASA, the Jet Propulsion Laboratory in Pasadena, the University of Arizona’s Lunar and Planetary Laboratory, the Canadian Space Agency, and Lockheed Martin Space Systems. The Friends of the Oviatt Library, a volunteer organization, arranged for Bass’s presentation and organized the luncheon, which was open to the general public.

—jd

Friends of the Library

USED BOOK SALE

Tuesday, February 20, 2007
9:00 A.M. – 3:00 P.M.

Hardbacks $1.00 Softbacks $.50 Small paperbacks are 25¢ or six (6) for $1.00

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Parking $4.00 per day
The Friends of the Oviatt Library invite you to join us for a buffet luncheon and presentation by
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Dennis McCarthy

Wednesday, February 14, 2007
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University Club • Northridge Room
California State University Northridge

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Please send your reservation and check (made out to CSUN Foundation) to:
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