

30th Anniversary of the Marion E. Wade Center

The year 1995 marks the thirtieth anniversary of the founding of the Marion E. Wade Center. It began with the vision of one man, Dr. Clyde S. Kilby, late Professor of English Literature at Wheaton College. At the time of its inception in February, 1965, the collection consisted of fifteen letters from C.S. Lewis to Kilby and the few books written by Lewis that Kilby had managed to acquire. Today the collection has grown into an internationally recognized research center with holdings now measured in the thousands. How did this come about? I offer the following brief account in honor of Dr. Kilby and the many others who over the years contributed to the Wade Center's success.

Although originally named the C.S. Lewis Collection, the works of Owen Barfield, G.K. Chesterton, George MacDonald, Dorothy L. Sayers, J.R.R. Tolkien, and Charles Williams were all envisioned as being part of the anticipated holdings from the beginning; further, with the exception of Chesterton, all were listed along with Lewis in the original proposal. Owing to Chesterton's large output of books and articles, Kilby decided to omit Chesterton from his first proposal because of the large funds that would be required to acquire these works. Chesterton was not to be denied, however, and in due course would take a prominent place alongside the other six.

There was a farsightedness about the grouping of these seven authors. Together they can be said to form a kind of school of thought. All seven shared a common nationality. Each found more common ground with the thinking of the past than with the thinking of their own time. Each shared Christian interests and wrote on Christian themes. All seven were poets. All were contemporaries with the exception of MacDonald, who had a formative influence on at least Chesterton, Tolkien and Lewis. Sayers came under the influence of Chesterton in her youth, met him as an adult, corresponded with him, and eventually followed him as president of the Detection Club after his death. Chesterton's influence on Lewis was considerable, while Williams and Barfield also drew inspiration from Chesterton. Williams, Tolkien, Lewis and occasionally, Barfield were members of the group known as the Inklings, which met regularly in Lewis's rooms at Magdalen College, Oxford, to discuss books and ideas, many of them their own. Lewis and Sayers corresponded and met together on several occasions for mutual encouragement, and Williams's importance for Sayers's work on Dante has been well documented. Although Barfield

and Lewis never could agree on who influenced the other most, Tolkien readily admitted that Barfield's idea of ancient semantic unity and its implications for the relation of myth and language helped to modify his whole outlook on the subject.

The Collection was officially established in 1965, but the seeds of its making were sown much earlier. By the mid 1940s, Kilby had come under the spell of Lewis and had begun reading anything by him that he could get his hands on. He was already well acquainted with Chesterton and by this time had read with great interest Dorothy L. Sayers's *The Mind of the Maker*. In 1952, he wrote Lewis for the first time to arrange a visit, which took place in Lewis's room at Magdalen College on July 1 of that year. Over the next eleven years, fourteen more letters were exchanged between them. By 1963, the year of Lewis's death, Kilby was speaking regularly on C.S. Lewis and J.R.R. Tolkien. The year previous he had begun offering a course on Lewis, Tolkien, Charles Williams and George MacDonald. In 1964 he published *The Christian World of C.S. Lewis*, and began work on a Lewis anthology published in 1969 as *A Mind Awake*. By early 1964, the idea of a special collection had become fixed in the intellectual and imaginative landscape of Kilby's mind. In the spring of that year, he shared with Wheaton College's librarian, Robert Golter, his intention of submitting a Collection development proposal to the Library Committee.

With this in mind, Kilby gave to the College archivist, Ruth Cording, seven of the fifteen letters he had received from Lewis, he booked Owen Barfield for the autumn Writers Conference, and he began to make plans for the first of nine trips to England on behalf of what he was already calling the Collection. By the summer, Kilby was in England. He met with Barfield, visited several times with Lewis's brother Major Warren Lewis with whom he had already been in correspondence, and enjoyed a brief yet unplanned meeting with Tolkien. Upon his return from England, Kilby turned over his remaining eight letters from Lewis to be deposited in the College Archives with the others and submitted a formal proposal for the Collection to the Library Committee. The submission of the proposal coincided with the coming of Owen Barfield in October to the Writers Conference. Barfield's presence proved timely and helped to establish the potential importance of the Collection. The remaining skeptics (for skeptics there were), were converted, and by February 1965 the Library Committee had approved Kilby's proposal and the C.S. Lewis Collection became a reality. This initial year ended with the announcement in the campus newspaper, *The Wheaton Record*, that the class gift of 1966 of \$2688 would be going to the newly established Lewis Collection.

Kilby returned to England in the summer of 1966 to work with Tolkien on the *Silmarillion*. For Kilby, it was an unforgettable experience which he shared in his book *Tolkien and the Silmarillion*. One of Kilby's students, then

studying at Aberdeen, Glenn Sadler, arranged for him to meet with Mrs. Charles Williams; this was to be the first of many meetings with Michal Williams. In addition, he also managed to spend a significant amount of time with Warren Lewis. As Kilby was preparing to return to the States, Warren informed him that he intended for his Lewis papers to come to Wheaton College. A letter from Major Lewis's lawyer received on August 24 confirmed Warren's intentions. In the same year, another major contribution was promised. Mrs. Mary Willis Shelburne (of *Letters to an American Lady*), promised to send 152 letters to Wheaton: 145 from Lewis, two from Warren, two from Barfield, two from Walter Hooper, and one from Joy Lewis. By the end of the year Kilby was assured that the Collection would in time become not only substantial but influential as well.

The years 1967 to 1974 saw a dramatic increase in holdings and an ever-widening network of contacts nurtured by the indefatigable labors of Kilby. In December of 1967, Owen Barfield once again visited Wheaton's campus. In addition to giving two lectures, he also delivered to Kilby from Warren Lewis 223 letters from C.S. Lewis to Arthur Greeves. The 152 letters from Mrs. Shelburne arrived this same year, along with letters from Lewis to Dom Bede Griffiths and Peter Milward. It was also in 1967 that a manuscript of Lewis's *An Experiment in Criticism* was added to the Collection. In 1968, 670 letters from Charles Williams to his wife Michal were received from her. The following year Barfield visited Wheaton's campus for the third time, Kilby made his third trip to England, and the third major acquisition to date was received from Barfield—copies of 283 pages of his correspondence from Lewis.

The year 1971 was a particularly important year for Williams and Barfield acquisitions. Kilby spent the entire fall quarter in England and returned with hundreds of pages of Williams letters, manuscripts, and papers received from Williams's son, Michael, and Raymond Hunt, Williams's literary executor. In addition, Barfield personally handed over to Kilby two sizable bundles of his manuscripts and papers. In 1972, the Collection was promoted from a small room in the basement of the library to the Charles Blanchard Memorial room in Blanchard Hall. In addition, Owen Barfield returned to Wheaton for the fourth time, and the first acquisition of Chesterton books was received from Paul Snezek, a new member of the library staff, who donated his personal collection of Chesterton books, many of them first editions.

The year following, 1973, saw the first significant MacDonald acquisition: sixty volumes purchased from a bookdealer in Ireland. It was also the year in which both Major Warren Lewis (April 9) and J.R.R. Tolkien (September 2) passed away. True to Warren's word, before the year's end, eleven typed volumes of the Lewis family papers, twenty-one

volumes of Warren's diaries, forty-five letters to Warren from his brother, plus family photographs, the Boxen stories, and a rare first edition of *Spirits in Bondage* were received. In addition, the Lewis brothers' childhood wardrobe was purchased at auction, along with Lewis's desk and chair, and dining room table. Additional Williams letters and manuscripts were received from Raymond Hunt, and a Steering Committee for the Collection was formed.

The year 1974 proved to be one of the most important of the Collection's brief ten year history. In honor of Mr. Marion E. Wade, founder of the ServiceMaster Corporation and C.S. Lewis enthusiast, friends and family established a fund to provide a yearly grant for the Collection that would now bear his name. Along with the name change (The Marion E. Wade Collection), came the inauguration of the Annual Wade Lecture. Another highlight of this year was the purchase of 726 Chesterton books, pamphlets, and hard-bound volumes, along with pictures, drawings, and newspaper clippings from a Chicago bookdealer; *Publishers Weekly* announced the acquisition in their July 15 issue, proclaiming that the purchase represented the finest Chesterton collection in the U.S. Also in this year, Kilby made another trip to England, meeting for the first time with Mr. John Sullivan, author of the authoritative Chesterton bibliography and well-known collector of Chestertoniana. Kilby received assurances from Raymond Hunt that his twenty-one volumes of bound notes, Williams books and manuscripts, along with a number of Chesterton volumes would be going to the Wade. It was on this trip as well that Kilby made the fortuitous acquaintance of one of Lewis's former students and longtime friend, George Sayer.

One of the key events of 1975 was the coming of Dr. Barbara Reynolds, Italian scholar and friend of Dorothy L. Sayers, to Wheaton College's campus. Her lecture at Wheaton, on Sayers and Dante, proved to be the beginning of an important association with the Wade Collection which continues to this very day. Kilby made two trips to England during this year, resulting in the acquisition of hundreds of pages of Williams manuscripts from Raymond Hunt. It was to be Kilby's last meeting with Hunt. Shortly after his return in November from England, he learned that Raymond Hunt had died. Kilby returned to Wheaton just in time for the first Annual Wade Lecture, delivered by Yale University scholar, Paul Holmer. The final highlight of 1975 was the purchase of 8000 pages of Sayers's manuscripts. This acquisition and the connection with Barbara Reynolds instantly made the Wade Collection an international center for Sayers's studies.

The years 1976 to the present have witnessed the steady growth of all facets of the Wade Collection. One of the most important events in 1976 was a change in location. In April, the Wade Collection was moved from

Blanchard to its present location on the second floor of the Nicholas Building in the College Library. The additional space provided by the move proved providential as the account of acquisitions in the years that followed reveals.

To begin with, in 1976, the remaining Raymond Hunt materials arrived, totaling 2113 manuscript pages. In 1977, arrangements were made by Kilby with Miss Dorothy Collins, Chesterton's longtime secretary and friend, to make xerox copies from her vast Chesterton holdings. Approximately 19,000 pages of material resulted from this enterprise. Pauline Baynes's map of Narnia and over seventy of her original Narnia drawings were purchased in 1978. The Chesterton collection was significantly enhanced in 1984 through the purchase of the John Sullivan collection. At the time, it was regarded as the greatest collection of Chestertoniana in existence. In addition to this and the 1974 acquisition, the Wade Collection's Chesterton holdings have been augmented in important ways since 1979 by the support and ongoing cooperation of Chesterton scholar Aidan Mackey. Two enormously important acquisitions were made in 1985: 2363 volumes of Lewis's personal library were acquired from Wroxton College, and over 30,000 pages of Sayers correspondence and papers were purchased from the Anthony Fleming Estate. Though significant acquisitions continue to be made up to the present, the last large acquisition of a collection to date was the very fine Raphael Shaberman collection of MacDonald first editions purchased in 1991. Interestingly, several years before the Shaberman acquisition, Mary Jordan, in comparing the MacDonald collections of Harvard, Yale, and the Wade Collection for her 1983 MacDonald bibliography, assessed the MacDonald book holdings of the Wade superior to the other two collections.

In addition to the acquisitions of these years, a number of equally important events took place. The key event of 1979 was the Writer's Conference which featured two of the Wade authors: C.S. Lewis and J.R.R. Tolkien. Participants included Humphrey Carpenter, Barbara Reynolds, and Thomas Howard. In view of the focus on Lewis and Tolkien, the Annual Wade Lecture was moved to coincide with the Conference. George Sayer delivered the Wade lecture, and then remained in Wheaton for three additional weeks to do research on his biography of Lewis. The Writer's Conference of that year was important for another reason as well. It was then that Dr. Barbara Reynolds announced the beginning of a new journal to be produced by the Wade Collection and to be called in reference to its seven authors, *Seven: An Anglo-American Literary Review*. Inspiration for the enterprise came from the literary triumvirate of Barbara Reynolds, Beatrice Batson, and Kilby. Nine volumes were published between the years 1980 to 1988. Then followed an interval of five years during which *Seven* was not published. It was revived in 1993 under the inspiration of Reynolds with an

issue devoted entirely to Dorothy L. Sayers in tribute to the centenary of her birth.

The announcement of Kilby's retirement as Curator in July of 1981 signaled the end of an era of the Collection's history. By the time of his retirement, the Wade Collection had already grown into an internationally recognized research library and archive—a living tribute to both his foresight and energy. The following year, the class of 1939 established the Kilby Research Grant in his honor. The yearly Grant is awarded by the Wade Center to a scholar, engaged in a publishable research project related to one or more of the seven authors, who has worked on the project at the Wade Center.

In 1983, Dr. Lyle Dorsett was appointed Kilby's successor. Prior to assuming his role as Director, Dorsett had published a biography of Lewis's wife Joy Davidman entitled, *And God Came In*. As part of the research for the book, Dorsett met and interviewed Joy's younger son, Douglas. In 1983, Douglas was invited to give the Annual Wade Lecture, which he did in November of that year. During Dorsett's tenure, the name was changed from the Wade Collection to the Wade Center, and the title Curator to Director. In addition to the books and articles Dorsett published during his seven years as Director, one of Dorsett's enduring contributions to the Wade Center has been the development of the Center's Oral History project. Today 70 oral history interviews are available to researchers due to his efforts. In 1990, Dorsett made the decision to step down as Director in order to resume a career of teaching.

During the years 1990 to my appointment as Director in 1994, the work of the Wade Center continued to flourish under the direction of the Center's Associate Director Marjorie Mead. A major remodeling and expansion of the Wade Center, begun in the fall of 1990, resulted in the creation of the Clyde and Martha Kilby Reading Room. Its dedication, in May of 1991, was especially noteworthy because of the recognition given to Martha Kilby for the faithful support of her husband's pursuits that spanned almost half a century.

In drawing this brief history to its end, I stand amazed at the creative vision it reveals. The achievement of the past thirty years has been nothing less than remarkable. I can only pray that during the next thirty years this legacy will be preserved.

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