

# The Bulletin

## "Young Archivist Digs Up The Unknown Barnes "

by Jim McCaffrey

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Merion Station - Forgotten in all the headlines, animosity, disputes, rumors, old grudges, new grudges, lawyers, courtrooms, large sums of money and determined efforts to move a \$6 billion art collection is the important, interesting and inspiring work being done by archivists at the Barnes Foundation.

Seven years ago when Katy Rawdon, a young archivist from Yale, entered the Barnes' buildings on Latches Lane in Merion Station, she found stored and scattered over the third floor and around the grounds what eventually proved to be 2,000 linear feet of foundation records and correspondence, a 5,000-volume uncatalogued library of art and horticulture books and another 1,000 rare books, periodicals, and exhibition and auction catalogues waiting to be indexed.

Ms. Rawdon arrived at the invitation of former Barnes' director Kimberly Camp, who had insisted on initiating the ambitious Collections Assessment Project and subsequently found the grant money to fund it.

Ms. Rawdon was hired as the first archivist in the history of the foundation. Her job is to do what has never been done before in the Barnes' 80-year history: catalogue, logically organize and make widely available the material in the foundation's archives.

Seven years of labor in the paper vineyards of the Barnes have yielded some sweet fruit for scholars, students, researchers and anyone interested in the history of art and the Barnes' aesthetic.

A year after Ms. Rawdon, archivist Barbara Beaucar was hired to catalogue Dr. Albert Barnes' business and professional letters.

Her work has uncovered long forgotten letters between Dr. Barnes and Henri Matisse, Leo Stein, Georgia O'Keefe, Philippe Cret and Jacques Lipchitz.

Among the most important finds from the perspective of art historians is his correspondence with influential early 20th-century Parisian art dealer Paul Guillame, who was important in the careers of some of the most celebrated artists in the Barnes' collection.

Ms. Rawdon shared some thoughts on her work last week in an interview at the Barnes' administration building. The building used to be the home of Dr. and Laura Barnes.

"[The archives are] important for people in a lot of different fields to see," Ms. Rawdon said of her work. "The collection is an extremely important resource and we are seeking to make

it more accessible. And I'll be really, really glad when it's done."

After working for most of a decade, the archivists are making final corrections on the 600-page inventory.

"In two to three months, on the Web site we should have a list of correspondence with some notes included and fairly extensive [outlines] of what is in the collection," she said.

The Web site should also soon have a new biography of Dr. Barnes written by the Barnes staff and based on what they have learned from the archives.

Ms. Rawdon has an admitted passion for horticulture and, consequently, a particular affinity for the arboretum.

It is from this perspective she says, "It is essential for an educational institution to have a good, well-used library. It's not easy to find a horticultural library. There is one downtown, but it is not always easy for students to go into the city. I am looking forward to seeing what comes out of [cataloguing of the horticulture book collection]."

Like much of the staff at the Barnes Foundation now, and similar to many of the students and staff of the past, Ms. Rawdon believes Dr. Barnes is misunderstood.

"I wish people would stop calling him 'Alfred,'" she complains. "I really wish they'd stop calling him eccentric or idiosyncratic. 'Irascible' is fine, but people should be accurate."

"The people who say the way the art is displayed in the gallery is idiosyncratic don't know what they are talking about. It is different. It is not eccentric. When you look at the Stein salon in Paris and other galleries of the time, you see it was common to display paintings floor to ceiling. Dr. Barnes was putting the wall ensembles together for an educational purpose. He did it in an extremely deliberate, very thoughtful manner. He was creating the wall ensembles for the use of the school and according to his theories. But that is not eccentric. It was ground breaking."

"He was not ostracized by his colleagues in education. He knew an incredible amount of people in education."

The great pleasure of chronicling such an archive is the discovery of lost material, Ms. Rawdon said.

"The Barnes collection is not all about a new building. Not to me."

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