

# Newsletter of The

# Katherine Anne Porter Society

Volume 4, Number 2

November 1997

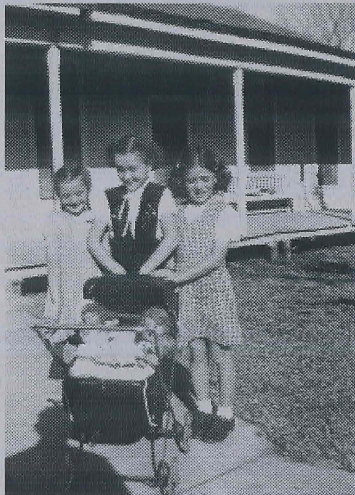
## Clark Dobson and Kathleen Feeley Remember Katherine Anne Porter

Editor's Note: The following remarks were made at the business meeting of the Katherine Anne Porter Society at the American Literature Association Conference in Baltimore, Maryland, on May 23, 1997. Dr. Clark Dobson, a Dean at George Mason University in Fairfax, Virginia, and Sister Kathleen Feeley, former President of the College of Notre Dame of Maryland who is currently the Director of Special Education for the Baltimore City Schools, shared recollections of their personal relationships with Katherine Anne Porter. Both knew her during the final years of her life. Because of the length of these reminiscences, only the remarks of Clark Dobson will appear in this issue. Sister Kathleen Feeley's remarks and responses to questions raised at the end of her remarks will appear in the next issue of the newsletter.

**Clark Dobson:** I really appreciate the Society and the fact that you're doing such great work to keep her work alive and our memory of her. Since you mentioned the coffin [that of KAP donated to the University of Maryland Libraries in 1996], I'll tell you how I acquired the coffin. Jack Horner, another great friend of Katherine Anne's, and I were helping Paul move furniture and with other matters

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## Katherine Anne Porter House Preservation Project



*(Top) Porter house in Kyle during the 1940s while owned by the Strawn family. The three girls are the Strawns' daughters, Fran, Joan, and June. (Bottom) Fran and June Strawn pose with a friend in front of 508 West Center Street, Kyle, Texas, in the 1940s. Papers of Katherine Anne Porter, Special Collections, University of Maryland Libraries.*

On Sunday, September 14, 1997, the Hays County Preservation Associates, Inc., and Southwest Texas State University held a social at the Katherine Anne Porter Home/Museum in Kyle, Texas. The purpose of the event was to publicize the efforts underway to help preserve the Katherine Anne Porter Home/Museum and to inaugurate a fund-raising campaign.

Shortly after Kyle was founded in 1880, Catharine Ann Porter, Miss Porter's widowed paternal grandmother, built the six-room house, at 508 West Center Street. She lived there alone until 1892, when her son Harrison, Katherine Anne's father, moved in with his four children after the death of his wife, the children's mother. The six of them lived there until sometime after the death of the grandmother in October 1901.

In 1942, Joe and Bertie Maude Strawn bought the house, reputedly from the Porter family. The Strawns repaired the house and added a bathroom and running water but did not alter its basic structure during the fifty years it remained in their family. In 1992, Mrs. Strawn sold the house to Ann Vliet, whose dissertation on Miss Porter was completed in 1968. In 1994, Yana and David Bland bought the house, opening it as a museum in 1995. The Blands advocated that the house be treasured as a gem of local, literary history. A group of Hays County citizens, under the name of the Hays County Preservation Associates, Inc., together with Southwest Texas State University devised a plan to purchase the house, make the repairs still needed, and use it for combined historic, cultural, and educational purposes.

The group plans to purchase the house, make necessary repairs, and turn it over to Hays County. The county will give a one hundred-year lease to Southwest Texas State University, which will oversee its upkeep and use the living quarters for a Katherine Anne Porter fellow. The Porter fellow will teach part-time in the university's creative writing program and also give talks and workshops for area youth who are interested in writing. The parlor and dining room areas will continue to display Porter's works and memorabilia and to be used as a meeting room. The creative writing competition, begun by the Blands two years ago, will continue.

The total needed to purchase and restore the house is \$150,000, which will be raised through contributions. In addition,

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## Katherine Anne Porter Society

The Newsletter of the Katherine Anne Porter Society is published at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas, by the Katherine Anne Porter Society, with the sponsorship of the UNLV English Department. Membership inquiries and renewals should be directed to Darlene Unrue (president of the society), Department of English, University of Nevada, Las Vegas 89154-5011, unrue@nevada.edu. Entries for the bibliographical essay on Porter should be addressed to Janis Stout, Department of English, Texas A & M University, College Station, Texas 77843, j-stout@tamu.edu. Articles, announcements, and comments for the newsletter should be sent to Beth Alvarez, Archives and Manuscripts, McKeldin Library, University of Maryland, College Park, Maryland 20742, ra60@umail.umd.edu.

The officers of the Katherine Anne Porter Society are Darlene Unrue, President; Janis Stout, Secretary; Beth Alvarez, Newsletter Editor. Members of the Executive Committee are Beth Alvarez, Virginia Spencer Carr (Georgia State University), John Edward Hardy (emeritus, University of Illinois at Chicago), George Hendrick (University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign), Janis Stout, and Darlene Unrue.

### KAP Society Membership

Katherine Anne Porter Society annual dues remain \$8 a year. Checks made payable to KAP Society/UNLV Foundation should be mailed to Darlene Unrue, Department of English, University of Nevada, Las Vegas, Las Vegas, Nevada 89154-5011. The KAP Society has tax exempt status through the University of Nevada, Las Vegas, Foundation, the fundraising arm of UNLV.



*Katherine Anne Porter and a group of other girls in Kyle, Texas, circa 1902. KAP is seated at far left. Her childhood friend Erna Schlemmer is seated to her left. Papers of Katherine Anne Porter, Special Collections, University of Maryland Libraries.*

### Porter House Preservation Project

*Continued from page 1*

tion, through grants, the university will seek to raise a \$750,000 endowment to provide for perpetual maintenance of the house and for the operation of the Creative Writers in Residence Program. Mr. Carroll Wiley, Director of Development and Estate Planning at the university, has actively advocated saving the house. He and Professor Tom Grimes of the MFA Program in Creative Writing are working with the local citizens committee, the Porter House Preservation Project, in conjunction with Preservation Associates, Inc., a non-profit corporation whose board includes prominent Texans. Advisory Committee members include Liz Carpenter, former U.S. Representative Jake Pickle, and U.S. Representative Lloyd Doggett.

All contributions are tax deductible and should be made to the Friends of the Hays County Historical Commission—Preservation Associates, Inc., and designated "For Porter House Preservation Project." Contributions or inquiries can be mailed to 1717 North Burleson Street, Kyle, Texas 78640.

### Katherine Anne Porter Society Membership Application/Renewal

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

Institutional affiliation \_\_\_\_\_

Telephone (work) \_\_\_\_\_ Telephone (home) \_\_\_\_\_

Fax \_\_\_\_\_ E-mail \_\_\_\_\_



## Dobson

*Continued from page 1*

when Katherine Anne had been moved to the Carriage Hill Nursing Home. Paul was closing down the apartment and selling furniture, giving it away. We had a truck, and we just went over to help him accomplish that. He was going to tear the coffin apart and throw it down the incinerator chute. So Jack and I had this kind of romantic wish that, perhaps, when Katherine Anne did pass away, we could somehow pull strings and have her buried in the coffin as we thought she wanted. So we asked if we could keep it, and Paul said sure. We hauled it away, and, for some years, we had it in the rafters in our garage. Then we thought it was entirely too beautiful to have out of sight. So I had a library, and we moved it into the library, and, for years, it was just leaning against the wall against the shelves. And I became very attached to it. We kept wondering what in the world can we do with this coffin to make it functional? We thought of putting shelves in it. We thought Katherine Anne would probably appreciate that. We also thought of putting it into a bar which she also would have appreciated even more. But we needed a hall closet added to the house, so we finally put a bar inside and used it sort of like a coat closet. We hung raincoats and so forth in it, but we loved the coffin. It was always sort of my dream that it would wind up at McKeldin Library in the Katherine Anne Porter Room. So I'm very pleased that it's there.

How did I meet Katherine Anne? I met Katherine Anne about 1970; it was through Jack Horner. He was having a lunch and invited me to go to that lunch at the Army-Navy Club in Washington, DC. And, of course, Katherine Anne was the honored guest. There were only four of us. I was, at that time, a young academic with a passion for books and writing. Of course, I knew Katherine Anne's work back then. I was thrilled to death to be just in her presence. I can remember to this day that she was sitting to my right. We were sitting around a very small square table so she was very close. And I really can't remember any of the specifics about the conversation. I was probably so terrified and overwhelmed that it just went right out of my mind. But she was at her wittiest best. I can remember that she was great fun. At some point in the conversation, the subject turned to sex. I can't remember the details about the discussion or the topic, but I do remember, this memory is so strong, that she leaned over very close and said, "I was married and divorced three times, and I never cared that much about it." So that one line was the one thing about the conversation I remember. After this we became friends, and I saw Katherine Anne a lot during the next decade until September 1980 when she died.

Katherine Anne and I also shared a passion for music, especially opera. In fact, my career earlier on was in music. One story I wanted to tell you was about going to Wolf Trap Park in Virginia to see Prokofiev's opera War and Peace. This was something Katherine Anne wanted to do. She made the request. So we bought tickets and took her there. It was with Jack Horner and Addie Hubbard. Addie is an important figure in Katherine



*Clark Dobson and Sister Kathleen Feeley in Baltimore in May 1997.*

Anne's life, but she not remarked on. I don't think she's ever mentioned in any of the writing, not in any of the biographical material that I can remember. But she was a nurse-companion for some years, and she and Katherine Anne became very, very close. I'll tell you a little bit more about Addie in a minute, because I wanted to make a point of that here, to make certain her name gets into the record. Jack Horner and Addie Hubbard could have cared less about Prokofiev's War and Peace, so we didn't sit together. Addie and Jack sat in the back of Wolf Trap and slept, I'm sure, through the event. Katherine Anne and I sat up front, and she was dressed fit to kill. Those of you who did have a chance to meet her would remember what a classy dresser she could be. She had a great fashion sense, and she always looked like a million bucks. Well, she really did that evening. She was wearing her big emerald, which I always thought looked about as large as a pigeon egg, huge, and her three yards of pearls. After she wrote Ship of Fools and finally had some money, one of the first things she did, according to her story, was to go to New York to a jeweler because she wanted to buy some baroque pearls. And so she selected some pearls, and the jeweler said well how many, how much. And she said, "I'll take three yards." She always did this, she counted them out like this. At Wolf Trap, she was wearing her baroque pearls and emerald and also decided that night to tell the story again, so everyone in a radius of twenty feet heard the story. And I had a horrible fear that someone was going to hit both of us on the head and run off with that emerald and those pearls. I learned a wonderful lesson that night about Katherine Anne and, perhaps, about truly great writers in general, her perceptiveness of what was going on around her. She didn't miss anything. You have to remember this is a woman in her eighties. I can remember her hitting my arm and pointing up. Up in the rafters of Wolf Trap were all these technicians. I'd never even realized they were up there; they were very unobtrusive. And they were silhouetted against a kind of blue sky that always reminds me of the color of the bottle of "Evening in Paris" perfume, a nice rich dark cobalt blue. But, in a very interesting, very perceptive way, she had captured that and the real beauty of that moment. It seemed like such a mundane thing, but she made it quite striking. And I had the feeling that she was cursed



with storing up impressions like that for, maybe, some future use. I think by that time it was a real habit for her. I was very intrigued by catching her in that manner. She just saw everything, and she saw it differently, certainly than I did, and, perhaps, than anyone I knew.

I wanted to say a little bit about Addie as I promised I would. Addie and Katherine Anne fought all the time. They fought, they argued, and yet they cared about each other a great deal. Katherine Anne really appreciated Addie's innocence, her genuineness, her lack of sophistication. In fact Katherine Anne referred to Addie as a bird amongst the vipers. I think that was the giveaway, that she really appreciated that about her. There's a great story that there was a funeral, and I don't remember whose funeral it was, but Addie was driving Katherine Anne. They went to the church service, and they were in the funeral procession going to the cemetery, probably Arlington cemetery. They'd run out of gas, but they were able to coast to a service station. That was the one thing that Katherine Anne never forgave Addie, and she would talk about it; from then on, she never forgot it. Addie, of course, is dead now, but she maintained an interest in Katherine Anne until toward the end of her life. I kept in touch to some degree, and we were able to talk and remind each other of our shared memories of Katherine Anne.

Another person who was very important at that time, who has sort of been left out of the record, is Bob Beach. Bob Beach was on the President's staff at the University of Maryland and, for quite a period, served as the liaison between Katherine Anne and the University. He was quite a gofer; he really served Katherine Anne very well. I think she learned to really appreciate Bob and what he did. They became very good friends during that period. He was one of those persons in her life that I don't think she got angry with, until he finally moved away to another university. At that part of her life, she got angry with many.

Another faithful friend I want to mention just in passing was Monroe Wheeler, who, especially during the last years, was an almost constant presence. Every time he was able to come down to College Park, he would come down and spend time with Katherine Anne. They'd been friends for decades and decades. He was a trustee of the Museum of Modern Art in New York City and continued to be a trustee until his death just a few years ago.

It was through Monroe that I met Glenway Wescott, who was another old friend of Katherine Anne's. And I'll tell you another story that came to mind when I was thinking about what I might say today. Katherine Anne always spoke of Glenway in the past tense as if he were dead. He wasn't dead, he was still living. I'd met him. She didn't see him very often at that point. We're talking about people in their eighties, and they weren't travelling a lot. But all of a sudden there was a planned visit by Glenway Wescott to Katherine Anne, and I was dying to see how she would react to that. I couldn't wait to be in the same room. And the most amazing thing happened, he was there, but she never acknowledged his real presence. It was like a wraith was in

the room or a spirit. It was almost like he physically was not in the room. And I've always found that really fascinating. Even after that visit, she continued to speak of him as if he were dead. In fact, once she even said, you know Glenway is dead. He was very much alive at the time.

Another thing I remember about Katherine Anne was her generosity of spirit. You all are people who read about Katherine Anne and the books that are written about her. Sometimes I am overwhelmed by the kind of mean spiritedness that seems to come through the writing about her. I'm sure that part of that was there, as it is in all of us. But the thing that I remember about Katherine Anne is not ever any meanness of spirit. It was always her generosity of spirit. And I'm reminded of one example of that. Jack Horner and I were constantly being called at almost any time. And we were privileged to be Katherine Anne's gofers. If she wanted company or if she wanted an errand run, we didn't mind being called. So we made many treks over to College Park to do that. So one Sunday afternoon Katherine Anne called, and I assumed that she wanted either company or wanted or needed something from the drug store. And so I got in the car and rushed over to College Park. When I went in, in her bedroom, and, at that point, she was bedridden, sat Robert Penn Warren and Eleanor Clark. What she had done was call to ask me to come over to sit with them, because she thought I would enjoy having this opportunity to meet Red Warren. Of course, it was thrilling to sit in the same room with two such great writers.

In the recent biography of Warren, he talks about that visit, and it disturbed me a little bit because he talked about how dreadful the visit was. My recollection of the visit was entirely different. I've thought about that a lot, and I think it was probably because he had not experienced the physical deterioration and even difficulty of communication that Katherine Anne had after her strokes. So it was probably much more of a shock to Robert Penn Warren and Eleanor Clark than it was for me, who was there more regularly. I saw the deterioration as a much more gradual, much less shocking kind of thing. It was a thrill to me to be in the presence of two really great people.

I wanted to say something about the last years because I don't think the last years have been described accurately yet. I was there, not many people were. There were some regular visitors including Jane DeMouy, Sister Kathleen; there were some sort of regulars in Katherine Anne's life. But sometimes those last years have been made to sound so God awful and so dreadful. I do think that that final year in the nursing home was dreadful because Katherine Anne was so unhappy there and wanted so desperately to get out of that environment. But years before, even after the strokes when she was bedridden most of the time, she had trouble communicating, and, of course, she could no longer write because her right arm was paralyzed. It required patience to communicate with her and made it difficult for people. It wasn't that she was less alert or less mentally capable. It was that the difficulty in communicating was so frus-



## The Year's Work on Katherine Anne Porter: 1996 Plus More for 1995

By Janis P. Stout, Texas A & M University

In the bibliographic report for 1995, I stated that the volume of work on Porter declined from the previous year. But in fact that was not the case. Several items published in 1995 simply had not yet been indexed by the MLA Bibliography when we went to press. Let's begin, then, with some belated entries:

1995 brought the publication of Robert Phillips's edition of William Goyen's letters, Selected Letters from a Writer's Life (University of Texas Press), a book that will be valuable for Porter scholars interested in biographical issues and issues of shared concern with craft. The volume includes twenty-two letters from Goyen to Porter, providing a generous sampling from their turbulent—indeed, at times wrenching—correspondence. By the way, Darlene Unrue published a searching and solidly scholarly review of the volume in Mississippi Quarterly, 1996.

Three valuable essays from 1995 were also not noted in the previous bibliographic essay:

Thomas Austenfeld's "What Makes a Western Writer? The Case of Katherine Anne Porter," Southwestern American Literature 20: 2 (1995): 35-42, presents a fresh view of Porter's regional identity, proposing that we think of her in relation to the West. After surveying pertinent biographical issues and establishing that Porter associated the West with death and violence, Austenfeld provides previously unpublished evidence of such an association in the form of a talk given by Porter at the Alexandria, Virginia, Library in 1960, entitled "Westward Ho!" He then develops these associations in a reading of "Noon Wine."

Mary Burgan's "The 'Feminine' Short Story in America: Historicizing Epiphanies," pp. 267-80 in American Women Short Story Writers: A Collection of Critical Essays, ed. Julie Brown (Garland), argues that Porter and Eudora Welty, as "founding mothers of the American modernist short story," thought about the short story in dialogue with the practice of Virginia Woolf and Katherine Mansfield. The argument that Porter and Welty were finding ways to historicize the technique of the epiphany is persuasive and important. Burgan is correct that "the southern celebration of feminine sensibility . . . too easily erases the perceptions of slaves, servants, and the poor," and I believe that she is correct, too, in judging that Porter's stories resist a "reliance on private revelations" that would occlude such "historical realities." One very small quibble: Texan as I am, I have to protest against the notion that Miranda and Paul's ramblings in "The Grave" occur "in the woods."

Last, Mary Titus offers in "A Little Stolen Holiday": Katherine Anne Porter's Narrative of the Woman Artist," Women's Studies 25 (1995): 73-93, a deep reading of "Holiday" as a text in which Porter tries to resolve conflicts between gender and vocation. Bringing to bear both biographical evidence and the drafts of the story found at the Humanities Research Center in Austin, she argues that the 1924 letters to Genevieve Taggard in which Porter claimed to be pregnant

and to have borne a stillborn son are in fact coded accounts of the gestation of Miranda, that is, of herself as a professional writer. The narrator's "doubling" with Otilie in "Holiday," and in particular their zestful ride on the funeral day, is an embrace of her own position of marginalization as a woman defeminized, under patriarchy, by her birthing of stories rather than babies.

Having voiced a friendly quibble at Burgan, I feel free to quibble at Titus as well for saying that Porter's childhood was spent in west Texas. Indian Creek, where she was born, was indeed, on the eastern fringe of west Texas, but Kyle is located in that ambiguous central belt between east and west. Maybe you have to be Texan to know what a great difference that makes. Or maybe you just have to be Texan to care.

### 1996

#### Books

Darlene Unrue's Katherine Anne Porter's Poetry (University of South Carolina Press) continues the work of her earlier "This Strange, Old World" and Other Book Reviews (1991) and of Ruth M. Alvarez and Thomas Walsh's Uncollected Early Prose of Katherine Anne Porter (1993) in making available previously uncollected or even unpublished material. The poems collected here will not change our existing labeling of Porter as a writer of prose fiction first and foremost. Poetry was assuredly not her strength. But they do, as Unrue says, provide a "commentary on her life and works" and an index to her intellectual views or emotional state at the time of composition. The introductory essay is sound and valuable.

#### Articles

Gary M. Ciuba, in "One Singer Left to Mourn: Death and Discourse in Porter's 'Pale Horse, Pale Rider,'" South Atlantic Review 61 (1996): 55-76, discusses the work of mourning in the story in terms of the Freudian theory of detachment and reattachment. That process entails, for Miranda, the adoption of an "anti-rhetorical rhetoric" and the rejection of "transcendent meaning in language." At the end of the story, Ciuba explains, Miranda cultivates a "self-conscious theatricality" in order to save herself from "radical identification with the deceased" Adam, but it is an artifice that will make the rest of her life "a cadaverous masquerade."

Tim Keppel's "Truth and Myth in Willa Cather's My Mortal Enemy and Katherine Anne Porter's Old Mortality," Willa Cather Pioneer Memorial Newsletter 40: 1 (1996): 20-24, proposes parallels between these two texts that have not, to my knowledge, been previously discussed comparatively. Keppel does not argue influence, but does discern a series of verbal and thematic similarities.

Darlene Unrue had an essay in a volume from Western Illinois University Press, The Eye of the Reporter: Literature's Heritage in the Press, edited by Bill Knight and Deckle McLean. Entitled "Katherine Anne Porter: Journalism in the Evolution of Art," the essay summarizes the known biographical facts about Porter's work with newspapers and presents stylistic analysis. The articles Porter published in El Heraldo de Mexico, Unrue says, display "the first



evidence of her mature style," combining "attention to facts and verbal clarity with her natural gift for creating sensory impressions." Despite her later disclaimers of the title "newspaper woman," her work as a journalist "contributed significantly to her art."

### **Dissertations**

Kristin Carolyn Curry's dissertation at Emory University, "The Art of a Genteel Rebel: The Craft of Katherine Anne Porter's Fiction," DAI 56: 7 (1996): DA9536375, develops a conception of Porter as a self-representational writer engaged in "a continuing project of self-invention" whose "perceptive depiction of her characters' development illuminates the modernist preoccupation with identity." Porter did not, Curry argues, employ simple duplicity in redefining her origins, but repeatedly produced texts about female development as means of re-inventing her self. Making "strategic use of language" to construct chosen effects, she wrote fiction that she could regard as the substance of her own identity.

Christine Hanks Hait's "Outlawed Spirit: Gender and Creativity in the Writings of Katherine Anne Porter," DAI 56: 7 (1996): DA9538409, completed at the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, proposes a pervasive image in Porter's work of the creative woman as a marginalized figure, an outlaw struggling to avoid entrapment. Silence and masking are strategies invoked for dealing with this sense of the woman artist as outlaw, but some characters, such as La Condesa, "act out their outlaw status . . . fearlessly assert[ing] their own authority and offer[ing] alternative visions of reality to those which their cultures impose."

The need to supplement the report for 1995 in this essay prompts me to urge all of you Porter scholars out there to let me know if you find that your work has not been reported. Demand a higher standard! Even better, demand to write the bibliographic essay yourself!



trating for her. Here's a woman whose life was words, and she was no longer able to control the words the way she had once before. They were there, and she wanted to continue to use them, but the paralysis really affected her speech. I was grateful that I'd heard all the stories because, when she would tell them again, I could fill in the blanks. So she would not get frustrated. So I would have wonderful long conversations with Katherine Anne during this time period when sometimes I think other people when talking with her only saw the frustration and interpreted that as being something dreadful. I really don't think that it was really dreadful until she actually moved out of her apartment. I've often wanted to say for her. I don't think she would use these words; she would certainly find some more elegant way of expressing it. But I could almost hear her say something like this. "Give me a break. I'm eighty-eight years old. For most of those years I've been insecure financially and emotionally. I was practically seventy before I had any financial security." It was really remarkable when you think about it. Often I've felt she was being judged as if she were a much younger person, when in actuality she was an eighty-eight year old and behaving very normally for an eighty-eight year old. I don't think it was quite as dreadful as it has sometimes made out to be.

By the way the stories, the ten years I knew her, there were so many telephone conversations that were wonderful. I've often thought that many of her really great stories were never written. And they were only available to us in oral form. She'd tell them on the phone, and all you'd have to do was get her started and off she would go. They were glorious. You wanted to say, let's sit down, write some of that stuff down, you must save it for posterity. So they were wonderful years for me, and I will be forever

## Halifax

For those of us who have puzzled over Porter's references to a place she calls Halifax in "Noon Wine" and "The Fig Tree," there has come some welcome information.

In "The Fig Tree," Grandmother's farm, Cedar Grove, is "always called," by Father, Halifax: "Hot as Halifax," he would say when he wanted to describe something very hot." Clearly, the name is used here as a euphemism for Hell, following the common principle of substitution using the same first letter. Miranda, of course, with her inquiring but often literal mind, takes it as an alternative name: "Are we going to Halifax, Aunty?" Aunty does not answer. But Grandmother does: "'Don't say Halifax, child, say Cedar Grove. Call things by their right names.'"

In "Noon Wine," though, the use of Halifax (occurring at the end of the murder scene) is quite different. There it appears to be a true place name: "Mrs. Thompson sat down slowly against the side of the house and began to slide forward on her

grateful for having had the chance to know her and to be able to spend some time with her and hopefully to have been of some service to her in her final decade.

**Question:** [Not on tape, apparently about KAP's coffin.]

**CD:** So we simply just never knew.

**Beth Alvarez:** I actually asked Paul Porter because, of course, now that the Libraries have the coffin everyone asks why wasn't she buried in it if she wanted to be. She wanted to be cremated and buried in it. Paul said something related to what Clark said, that he was told, if he had her cremated in the coffin, all there would be would be wood ashes potentially because she was very, very small at that point. So that it would be nothing. It never occurred to him until I asked him, because of all these questions, that he could have buried her in the coffin. He just never thought of it.

**CD:** I've often thought, too, that there was a little bit of Sarah Bernhardt in all of this. You know the great story. Katherine Anne was an admirer of Sarah Bernhardt, and she loved telling the story of her father taking her to see Sara Bernhardt in a tent theater on one of Bernhardt's later tours. And, of course, Sarah Bernhardt always travelled with a coffin and supposedly slept in it, and it was great PR. I'm sure it was a great conversation starter, and sometimes I suspect that Katherine Anne was emulating Sarah Bernhardt a little bit by having the coffin. It was probably not terribly important that she was buried in it or not.

face; she felt as if she were drowning, she couldn't rise to the top somehow, and her only thought was she was glad the boys were not there, they were out, fishing at Halifax . . ."

Janis Stout recently received a friendly e-mail message from William T. Johnson, head of the Burdine Johnson Foundation that will play a role in seeing that the Porter house is preserved. Mr. Johnson quoted the "Noon Wine" passage and added the following:

Greetings from Halifax—the Halifax Ms. Porter had in mind (or so I'd like to think) . . . I've been living on the Halifax Ranch (4 miles west of Kyle) since 1971 but have only quite recently become interested in Katherine Anne Porter. It's my perhaps sentimental belief that "fishing at Halifax" refers to Halifax Hole, a long deep stretch of the Blanco River (in view from my house) that has been known as a good fishing hole to the locals around Kyle since well before 1900.

Four miles west of Kyle would indeed put Halifax very near Buda and Aunt Cat's farm. Thanks, Mr. Johnson.



## Porter Activities at the University of Maryland Libraries

By Beth Alvarez, University of Maryland

The period between May and October 1997 was marked with much activity related to the Porter holdings at the University of Maryland Libraries. The announcement that the National Endowment for the Humanities fully funded the Libraries' proposal to microfilm the most valuable and heavily used portions of the Papers of Katherine Anne Porter resulted in a surge of researcher requests and visits. This response came as a reaction to the announcement that the papers would be closed to researchers as the microfilming takes place. The papers were closed on October 10 so that preparations for filming can proceed unimpeded by on- and off-site research requests. Portions of the collection will become available as the microfilming proceeds. Researchers will be able to consult the microfilm in College Park or at the library at their home institution via inter-library loan. At



KAP and Toni Willison at South Hill in June 1976. *Papers of George and Toni Willison, Special Collections, University of Maryland Libraries.*

present, the Libraries are developing policies for loaning the microfilm. Announcement of the policies and availability of the microfilm will appear on the Libraries' Literary Manuscripts homepage (<http://www.lib.umd.edu/UMCP/ARCV/litmss.html>), in various scholarly journals, and in this newsletter. Notification will also be mailed to those on the Libraries' Katherine Anne Porter mailing list. Anyone wishing to be added to that mailing list should contact me.

During this six-month period there were twelve on-site researchers, eight of whom were graduate students. Researchers travelled to College Park from Georgia, Illinois, Maryland, Nevada, Pennsylvania, Virginia, and Texas as well as from Mexico and the Netherlands. Telephone, mail, and e-mail inquiries have also been received from California, Connecticut, Georgia, Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kentucky, Maryland, Massachusetts, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, Nevada, New Hampshire, New York, Ohio, Tennessee, Texas, and Virginia, and from Great Britain, Israel, the Netherlands, and Spain. The bulk of these requests came from graduate students and scholars, but there have been a number of requests for information and photographs from the media and from high school students.

The Libraries continued to receive the stalwart support of the seven women who serve as docents in the Porter Room: Freddy Baer, Shirley Bauer, Esther Birdsall, Dorothy Galvin, Rose



Gold framed mirror that KAP claimed was "from a coal baron's drawing room" at South Hill, October 1984. *Papers of George and Toni Willison, Special Collections, University of Maryland Libraries.*

the arrangement of Miss Porter's clippings (Series VI). Bill and his wife, Fern, have donated additional Porter memorabilia, photographs and negatives, as well as some Porter-related ephemera. The memorabilia includes a bottle of Florida water (cologne) that had been used by Miss Porter in the 1970s and two charming painted Mexican pottery doves. The thirty-four photographs and negatives represent twenty-three separate images including Eugene Pressly, Miss Porter, and other individuals and places relating to her. Several of these appear to be unique, not duplicating photographs in the existing collection in any way.

Although not fully processed, the Papers of George and Toni Willison, comprising all of the Porter materials formerly owned by Mrs. Willison, are now available to researchers. This collection includes Miss Porter's letters to the Willisons that were purchased by the Libraries and also the Willison family's bequest of the remainder of Mrs. Willison's Porter-related collection. This bequest includes notes by Mrs. Willison and her son Malcolm on Miss Porter and drafts of Mrs. Willison's letters to others about Miss Porter (1967-1992) as well as letters from Paul Porter to Mrs. Willison (1980-1992). There are also letters from Jim Wayne Miller to Mrs. Willison about Miss Porter and a signed agreement indicating that Miller would write a book on South Hill (1983-1985). Photographs of South Hill, including two in which Miss Porter and Mrs. Willison appear, and clippings and other ephemeral materials by or about Miss Porter (1932 to 1980) comprise the memorabilia in the collection. The collection also includes letters from Bill and Fern Wilkins to Florence Willison (1977-1996). The Willison family wishes that the Wilkinses' further contribution, approving the donation of their letters, be gratefully recognized. The family also pointed out a few errors in the account in the last issue of the newsletter. "George Willison's book reviewed by KAP was Saints & Strangers, not Sinners—because the pilgrims, to round out the

Ann Jackson, Beverly Lewoc, and Betty Warner. During the six-month period covered by this report, the room was open to the public nineteen afternoons, and there were a total of 184 visitors.

Bill Wilkins continues to support the Porter holdings at Maryland both with his volunteer efforts and with additional gifts. Drawing on the expertise he developed working with Miss Porter on her Cotton Mather manuscript, Bill culled and sorted the Mather materials in Series II of the Porter papers. At present, he is reviewing

*Continued on page 7*

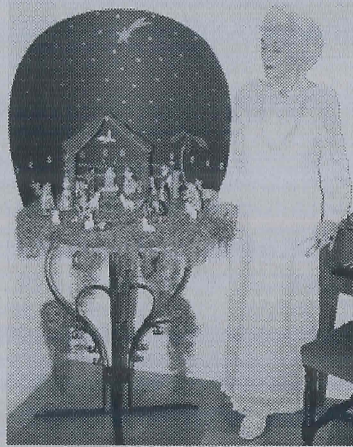


## University of Maryland Libraries

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Mayflower's company brought in nonmembers of their little sect, calling them 'strangers.'" Also George Willison had already left the WPA Writers Project by 1943, before *Saints & Strangers* was published, to work at the Civil Aeronautics Administration and then as a speechwriter for the Democratic National Committee in Washington, DC.

My efforts in the last six months have focused on the NEH-funded project to microfilm forty-eight linear feet of the paper portion of the Porter collection. The grant enabled the Libraries to hire Rachel S. Vagts as the project archivist. A recent graduate of the master's program in Library and Information Studies at the University of Wisconsin, she holds an undergraduate degree from Gustavus Adolphus College. Her experience includes two years at the Archives Division of the State Historical Society of Wisconsin. From April 1996 until accepting the Libraries' offer, she was an archivist at the society working on a project to microfilm scrapbooks of the advertising firm of Foote, Cone, and Belding. Since September 2 when Miss Vagts joined the Libraries, we have concentrated on securing a microfilm vendor; we expect to select the vendor by December 1. In the meantime, Patty Rettig, the graduate assistant who has been hired to support the project, has continued the work of final arrangement of the collection and



*KAP and her nativity in her College Park apartment in the 1970s. Papers of Mr. and Mrs. William R. Wilkins, Special Collections, University of Maryland Libraries.*

guide revision begun this summer by former graduate assistant Rebecca Zeltinger. Miss Vagts has made great headway in preparing targets for the microfilm edition, and I have continued my work reviewing the arrangement and description of the collection. We expect to have the arrangement of the collection and the new guide completed in January. The schedule for the actual microfilming and availability of portions of the microfilm edition of the papers will not be finalized until arrange-

ments have been made with the successful vendor. Those details will be publicized in the next issue of the newsletter as well as through the channels mentioned in the first paragraph of this report. Please do not hesitate to contact me if you have further questions about the microfilming or any other matter relating to the Libraries' Porter holdings.

## Minutes of the Katherine Anne Porter Society Meeting, 1997

The Society met on May 23, 1997, in Baltimore, following its paper session at the American Literature Association conference. Darlene Unrue, president, opened the meeting at 4:10 p.m.

The first order of business was Dr. Unrue's report on the need for changes in the by-laws of the Society and the impracticality of making those changes in the way specified by the by-laws, i.e., through the calling of a special meeting. Charlotte Beck moved, and Jewel Brooker seconded, that the by-laws be suspended. The motion passed unanimously. Amendments will be circulated among members by mail, for a written ballot, perhaps along with the fall issue of the Society's newsletter. Prior to that time, a mailing will be sent to all persons who are or have been members, notifying them of their status with respect to payment of dues. The subsequent vote will then include only those who are members in good standing.

Beth Alvarez reported on the publication of the newsletter and asked people to send in items for inclusion. Specifically, she asked that people send information and comments regarding their teaching of Porter's work, so that a substantial piece on that topic can be developed. Alvarez also distributed copies of the present draft of the new guide to the Katherine Anne Porter Papers.

Janis Stout called attention to an item in the newsletter, an-



*Joseph Csicsila, Andrew R. Burke, Christine Hanks Hait, Mary Titus, and Darlene Unrue before the Society's paper session in Baltimore on Friday, May 23, 1997.*

nouncing that a panel on Porter is being proposed for the 1998 meeting of the Society for the Study of Southern Literature, and invited submissions.

Following the business meeting there was a presentation by persons who had known Porter personally. Sharing their reminiscences were Clark Dobson, Academic Dean at George Mason University, and Sr. Kathleen Feeley, former president of the College of Notre Dame, currently Director of Special Education for the Baltimore City Public Schools. After the presentations, several of the members present gathered at a nearby restaurant to continue discussions informally.



## Katherine Anne Porter Museum News

The Katherine Anne Porter Museum in Kyle, Texas, sponsored a celebration on May 15, 1997, Miss Porter's 107th birthday. The featured speaker was Don Graham, the J. Frank Dobie Regents' Professor of American and English Literature at the University of Texas at Austin. Anne Fears Crawford's feature article on the museum, "Museum Honors Texas Writer," appeared in the June 8, 1997, issue of Texas, the Sunday magazine of the Houston Chronicle. This year's Katherine Anne Porter Literary Festival, organized by David and Yana Bland, the owners and operators of the museum, will be held on Saturday, December 13. Mark Busby and Linda Bingham, two of last year's winners, will serve as judges. Winners in the various categories will be awarded certificates, books, and cash prizes. Live music and snacks will follow the presentations. Some members of the board of the museum are attempting to establish a Katherine Anne Porter academy or charter school for students fourteen to eighteen years of age who do not fit into the school system and have a literary bent.

## 1998 Conference on American Literature in San Diego

The Katherine Anne Porter Session at the forthcoming American Literature Association conference will be chaired by Virginia Spencer Carr of Georgia State University. Again, as last year, all topics will be considered. Those interested should prepare abstracts of 150 words or less for proposed presentations of fifteen to eighteen minutes in length. Mail abstracts to Professor Carr, English Department, Georgia State University, Atlanta, GA 30303 or fax them to her at 404-651-1710. Proposals will be accepted until March 1.

The conference will be held in San Diego, California, May 28-31, 1998. Members wishing to attend should make hotel reservations early, as the American Literature Association is notoriously slow in disseminating information about its annual meeting by mail. Reservations can be secured by directly contacting the Bahia Resort Hotel, 998 West Mission Bay Drive, San Diego, California 92109. Telephone numbers are 1-800-288-0770 and 1-619-488-0551. Information about the conference can be found on the homepage of the American Literature Society: <http://english.byu.edu/cronin/ala.htm>.