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ANGELICA SINGLETON VAN BUREN (1816-1877)

an exhibit from the books recently donated by Mr. and Mrs. David Phillips of Florence, S.C.

July-August 1997
Main Lobby Exhibit Area
Thomas Cooper Library
INTRODUCING ANGELICA SINGLETON

The books displayed here belonged to Angelica Singleton Van Buren (1816-1877), the South Carolina-born daughter-in-law who was President Martin Van Buren's hostess at the White House. They are among a larger group of books, from the Barnwell and Singleton families, that were for many years in the home of Miss Malinda Barnwell of Florence, S.C. The collection has recently been donated to the University by Mr. and Mrs. David Phillips of Florence.

Angelica Singleton, daughter of South Carolina planter Richard Singleton and Rebecca Travis (Coles) Singleton, was raised at the family plantation Home Place, in Sumter, South Carolina. During the late 1820's and early 1830's she attended Madame Greiaud's Seminary in Philadelphia, along with her older sister Marion; such seminaries offered young ladies instruction in such subjects as grammar, languages, deportment, history, and music.

After leaving school Angelica spent time in Washington D.C. with distant relation Senator William Campbell Preston and his family. Her mother's cousin Dolley Madison, introduced her to Washington society, and in November 1838 Angelica married Abraham (Abram) Van Buren, the President's oldest son and personal secretary, whom she had met at a White House dinner earlier that year. The President reportedly approved of the marriage and the ties it brought between the White House and the powerful Southern aristocracy.

After an extended European honeymoon, Angelica returned in 1839 with her husband to live in the White
House and to serve as its hostess for Van Buren’s remaining years in office.

When President Van Buren left office in 1841, Angelica and Abram first visited with Angelica’s family in Sumter, where Angelica gave birth to their first son Singleton, and then settled at Van Buren’s estate Lindenwald, in Kinderhook NY. The Van Burens continued to winter in South Carolina, and she later inherited Home Place. In 1848 the Van Burens moved to New York City, where Angelica was known for her charitable work.

THE EXHIBIT

Engraving of Angelica Singleton
From Munsey’s Magazine, 38 (March 1907).

The Keepsake for MDCCCXXX
Ed. F. M. Reynolds.
London: Hurst, Chance & Co., 1830.  
*Inscribed “To Angelica from a Friend.”*

The Atlantic Souvenir for 1830
*Inscribed “From Marion to her sister Angelica.”*

Angelica Singleton’s Autograph Album
This manuscript volume, from 1831, includes inscriptions, poems, and sketches from school friends and teachers. The largest section commemorates Angelica’s role as “Queen of May” in 1831; it includes “Address spoken by Miss A.L. Pearson to the Queen of May Miss Sarah Angelica Singleton, May 1 ’31” and Angelica’s “Reply,” written by Edward Clayson, the English master, asserting that “Queen Angelique / Is not so weak / As some folks please to think,” and that “Men don’t wed girls / For eyes or curls / But court them for their Cash.”
John Aiken, 1747-1822, ed.
Select Works of the British Poets.
Signed “Angelique Singleton 1834.”
George Combe, 1788-1858
System of Phrenology.
Boston: Marsh Capen & Lyon, 1835.
Inscribed “Angelica Singleton from R. M. Deveaux 1835.”

Engraving of Mrs. Dolley Madison
An American [J. F. Cooper, 1789-1851],
Gleanings in Europe.

It was especially exciting to discover among Miss Barnwell’s books this first edition, in the original binding, of a pseudonymous travel book by America’s first major novelist James Fenimore Cooper.

Thomas Gray, 1716-1771
The Poetical Works of Thomas Gray.

Robert Burns, 1759-1796,
The Poetical Works of Robert Burns.

Richard Monckton Milnes, 1809-1885,
The Poems of Richard Monckton Milnes.
The inscription indicates that it was bought on Angelica’s European honeymoon.

Alexander Slidell Mackenzie, 1803-1848.
The Life of Commodore Oliver Hazard Perry.

Catharine Maria Sedgwick, 1785-1867
Letters from Abroad to Kindred At Home.

Grace Aguilar, 1816-1847,  
The Mother's Recompense.  
Signed "Angelica Van Buren 46 East 21st Str."

Charles Dickens, 1812-1870, ed.  
Household Words, A Weekly Journal  
London: Bradbury and Evans, 1855.  
Signed "Angelica Van Buren Geneva 1856."

Saba Smith, Lady Holland, d. 1866,  
A Memoir of the Reverend Sydney Smith.  

Charles Kingsley, 1819-1875  

Rhonda: a novel.  
By the author of 'Things by Their Right Names,' 'Plain Sense,' &c.  
London: Henry Colburn, 1816. Each volume is signed "Angelica Van Buren 46 East 21st Str."

Memoires du Duc de Sully.  

Memoires du Cardinal de Retz, de Guy-Joli et de la duchesse de Nemours.  

Sir Henry Taylor, 1800-1876.  
Notes from Life in Six Essays.  
Angelica Singleton Van Buren
Photograph in later life

Edward J. Trelawny, 1792-1881
Recollections of the Last Days of Shelley and Byron.

Books belonging to Mary Carter Singleton (1837-1863) and other family members

Literary taste in the next generation after Angelica is represented by her niece, Mary Carter Singleton. Twenty years on, the upbringing of a South Carolinian young lady remained remarkably similar to Angelica’s own, including attending a finishing school, yet Mary Singleton’s books show also a significant new interest in works by women authors and about women’s issues. In 1858, Mary married Rev. Robert Barnwell, so providing the link between the Singletons and the Barnwell family, through whom this collection descended. Also displayed in this case are books from the Phillips’ gift from other members of the family, including her sons, along with some unsigned items from the collection that round out the picture it gives of women’s reading in the mid-19th century.

Caroline Gilman, 1794-1888.
The Sibyl, or New Oracles From the Poets.
New York: George P. Putnam 1849. Inscribed “To Mary from her father Dec. 28th 1849.”
The Village in the Mountains; Conversion of Peter Bayssiere; and History of a Bible.

Frederick Rowton, ed.


Lydia Howard Sigourney, 1791-1865.


Sir Walter Scott, 1771-1832


Sir Walter Scott, 1771-1832.


Charles Dickens, 1812-1870.


George Alfred Lawrence, 1827-1876.

The Barnwell family books

While this exhibit highlights books from the Singleton family, the Phillips' recent gift includes also books from the Barnwells, a collection especially strong in 19th century theology. Displayed from the Barnwell books is the first book by the English Victorian novelist, "George Eliot" (Marian Evans), her anonymous translation, in three volumes, of the *Life of Christ*, by the German scholar David Friedrich Strauss.

This exhibit has been curated for the Department of Rare Books & Special Collections by Jennifer Talley, a graduate student in the joint MA-MLIS program in English and Library & Information Science.

The Barnwell and Singleton family books form part of Thomas Cooper Library's growing Department of Rare Books & Special Collections, which preserves and makes available to researchers a wide range of research materials. Other collections of related interest include extensive holdings of 19th century English and American literary annuals, and of 19th century fiction, and the Francis Lord Collection on the Civil War.

General information about these and other collections is available on the Department's web-page, and individual items are described in the library's on-line catalogue USCAN. Inquiries about use of the materials may be directed to Rare Books & Special Collections, Thomas Cooper Library, University of South Carolina, Columbia, SC 29208 (tel: 803-777-8154; e-mail: scottp@tcl.sc.edu)