

Report from Newport

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Sir,

Mr. Radier, Col of Engineers complains that he cannot procure provisions for his wife and that of his family. Application it seems has been made to Mr. Kane, who I understand is appointed to supply the Staff and has been rejected — You will be pleased to give proper directions in this matter, and inform the bearer where he can constantly draw.

I am Sir

Your humble Servant
Alex Hamilton
Aide de Camp

Head Quarters White
Main Aug 9th 1778

To The Principal Commissary
of Forces in Camp

A MAN OF LETTERS

Library acquires significant collection from noted historian John Grenville Winslow.

Last year John Grenville Winslow, well-known Newport philanthropist, historian, and a mainstay of the city's celebrated society, donated a collection of 250 historic family documents and 10 older, related books to the McKillop Library's Special Collections.

They are so important in the wealth of information contained in letters among Winslow's ancestors, the Brevoorts, that experts hope others will be inspired to donate such items as well.

"This is a great asset to have here," said Maria Bernier, university archivist, about the collection. "Students have worked with it. I would love to get more primary source documents for the archives and special collections – diaries, journals, first-person accounts – especially if they pertain to Rhode Island and, in particular, Newport."

John Grenville Winslow, now in failing health, was a vivid character in his heyday, serving as president and chairman of the board of The Preservation Society of Newport County from 1977 to 1989 – years of significant expansion for the organization. (He is chairman emeritus, and an enormous portrait hanging over the fireplace in the Society's board room captures his distinctive persona, right down to the cigar clutched in the fingers of his right hand.)

He also presided over Bailey's Beach in Newport for many years and served both on the board of the Newport Music Festival and as an honorary trustee, where his associates included then-Salve Regina President M. Therese Antone, R.S.M., and the late President Lucille McKillop, R.S.M.



John Grenville Winslow



Ph.D. candidate and adjunct professor Rip Irving and University archivist Maria Bernier examine some of the letters in the Winslow collection, which Irving was instrumental in acquiring for the library.

The donated documents reveal a number of qualities that have endured through the generations. Family members – including Winslow – are expert historians, deeply involved in civic matters, outspoken and active in the social circles of their time.

Winslow is the godfather of Washington Irving III, known as Rip, an adjunct professor and a candidate in the Ph.D. program, who played a major role in the acquisition of the papers.

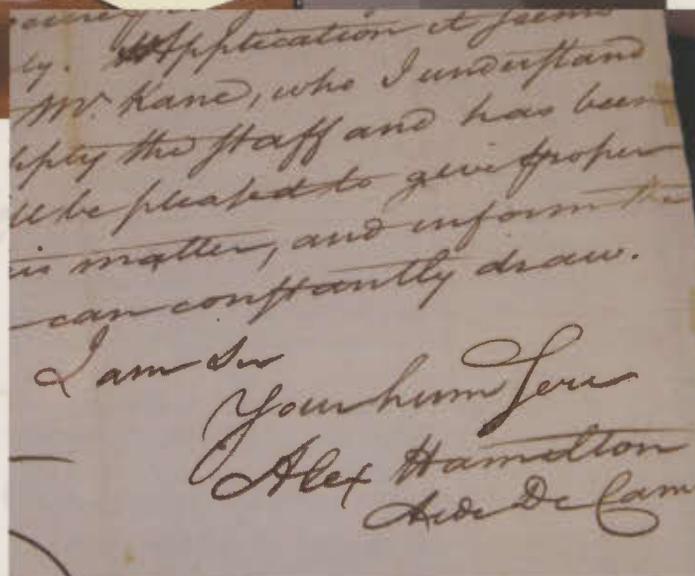
“He and my dad were good friends,” Irving explains. “Because John and I get along well and because I have Washington Irving’s name and an interest in him, he was kind enough to give me the original papers [more than a dozen letters between Henry Brevoort and the famous author].

“As for the rest of the collection, he wanted something of substance to come out of it,” Irving added. “He was trying to decide whether to donate it to the historical society or the Redwood Library. I mentioned that Salve Regina was updating [its archives and collection area], and John thought the University was probably a good place for them. He was hoping that someone would go through the material, organize it and use it as a base from which to write something of substance.”

Winslow’s wish has come true. The papers are preserved in the library’s new climate-controlled special collections area, where they are accessible to guests, students and faculty.

“Some undergrads in the department of history have already used the Winslow collection,” Irving added. “Ideally, someone in the graduate school will be able to get into them in more depth, and offer a study of the web of Brevoort connections to Newport or an analysis of how the privileged were educated at that time.”

Helen Winslow calls her husband’s family papers a view into “an 18th-and 19th-century way of life,” but they are more the



One of the documents in the collection features this letter by Alexander Hamilton, first secretary of the U.S. treasury, founding father, economist, political philosopher and aide-de-camp to General George Washington during the American Revolutionary War.

chronicle of the rising prominence of a pioneering immigrant family. The Brevoorts, Winslow’s forbears, arrived from Holland in the 1600s. As major landholders and members of high society, they became as important to New York City as the Vanderbilts and Astors.

Henry Brevoort Sr. was an acknowledged character who refused to let the city of New York cut a road through his vast farm stretching from Grace Church, at Eleventh Street, to the Brevoort Hotel on Fifth Avenue. Instead, the city diverted Broadway and canceled plans to lay out the section of Eleventh Street facing the Brevoort homestead.

His son, Henry Brevoort Jr., extended the Brevoort interests, forming associations with the preeminent artists, writers and politicians of the day. In 1840, his wife, Laura, gave a fancy dress ball in their mansion at the corner of Ninth Street and Fifth

Meet Washington Irving III

Adjunct professor was instrumental in acquiring Winslow collection.

Washington Irving III, known as Rip – as in Van Winkle – is a great-grand-nephew of the famous author and a great-grandson of his brother, Ebenezer. He has cheerfully borne his nickname through life without bother.

“It was easier than Washington,” he notes. “It seemed to go over fine; no one seemed to question it.”

In keeping with tradition, he named his son Washington Irving IV and his sobriquet relates to the author’s work: He’s called Knick after the pen name Dietrich Knickerbocker, used by the author when writing his satiric “A History of New York.”

When he’s not busy pursuing his Ph.D. in the humanities, Irving teaches undergraduate English and general studies as an adjunct professor. “I like the congeniality, the fact that the University is based on open-mindedness and yet it still has a mission statement that does not confine but opens,” he said. “The students are very nice. They are centered, particularly by the time they get to their senior year. I see these kids interacting with each other in a mature way.”

Before settling here to teach and work on his doctoral dissertation, Irving lived in numerous states, sailed around the Caribbean and acted with professional companies for 20 years, including the Rhode Island Shakespeare Theater, where he got his start.

“I was born in Providence,” he says, “and I was in a lot of different places – New Mexico, Colorado, Boston, Florida – before returning to Rhode Island. I didn’t want to go back to Providence. I knew some people here in Newport and it’s just so beautiful. It’s a walkable town and you can bike ride on Ocean Drive or go on the [breathtaking] Cliff Walk.”

Irving landed a job as head of the English department at St. Michael’s Country Day School in Newport and stayed six years. He earned a master’s degree in English from the University of Rhode Island and then, out of the blue, he became

an actor. It was a profession he passionately embraced for two decades, taking on leading roles and working in management.

“After the master’s degree and teaching, I decided I wanted to get into something more visceral,” he explains. “I was 30 and had never acted before.” Married and a father, Irving made a leap of faith. “Through my master’s program I had to write an essay on one of the Henrys in Shakespeare.” His University of Rhode Island professor, a former actress, wanted to know how her students might stage the play.

“I called the Rhode Island Shakespeare Theater and asked if they had tapes of productions,” Irving recalls. Upon learning that they did not, he found himself making a life-changing inquiry: “You don’t have acting classes, do you?” It turns out they did. He enrolled and says, “I fell in love with it.”

Irving would go on to play many leading roles with such respected area theaters as 2nd Story, Perishable and the Shakespeare company during its heyday in quarters at Swanhurst, the Bellevue Avenue mansion dating to 1851.

“I was getting roles and having a great time, learning a lot,” Irving says, adding that he wound up heading the theater’s board of directors, helping to write grants, raising money and taking on other diverse tasks.

Once again he changed course, buying a 40-foot sloop and single-handing around the Caribbean for a couple of years. “When I came back, I decided to return to academia,” he said.

Irving has hit his stride now, and all that remains is for him to complete his dissertation, a project that would make his namesake proud.

“I’m writing a 300-page novel and a 150-page critique of that novel – two full-length works,” Irving explained. “The novel has philosophical underpinnings presented through narrative and character. I think it’s a first for *Salve Regina*. I’m giving myself two years to complete it.”



The collection includes correspondence between the Brevoort boys, while they were in boarding school, and their parents.

Avenue. It was called “the most splendid social affair of the first half of the 19th century.”

There are also 50 or 60 connections to the Brevoort family through ancestry in Newport, and several very prominent houses in the city are associated with the Brevoort family, including Honey-suckle Lodge, Stone Gables and Oaklawn.

Two fat folders in the Winslow collection trace an intimate exchange of correspondence between Mr. and Mrs. Henry Brevoort – in New York and other locations, including Paris – with their sons, Carson Brevoort and William A. “Willie” Brevoort, while the boys attended Hofwyl, an experimental boarding school near Berne, Switzerland, from 1831 to 1835.

The boys describe school life with its language divisions: older boys spoke English; medium spoke German and the youngest, which they were, spoke French. They also report on the travails of their peers. One child had an obsessive fear of fire; a large, awkward Russian boy was bullied.

“It’s rare to have both sides of the correspondence in one collection – both from the parents and from the children,” says Bernier. “It’s nice that someone kept them all. These letters have the most research value. It really would be fun to do a history

A Treasure Trove

Besides the Winslow family documents housed in Salve Regina's archives and special collections, the McKillop Library is home to a veritable treasure trove of documents, books, recordings, photographs, maps and faculty publications just waiting to be discovered.

of education using this collection."

Through personal letters filled with insight and opinion, Henry Brevoort Jr. maintained friendships with the movers and shakers of his day. Among them was the artist Rembrandt Peale, who painted his portrait. In one of three letters to Peale, Brevoort encouraged the artist to paint George Washington in a historic setting, asserting that the iconic Washington portrait by Gilbert Stuart, Saunderson, Rhode Island's favorite son, was unflattering.

Brevoort's son, Carson, went on to become a civil engineer, private secretary to Washington Irving – then U.S. Minister to Spain – and was, for 26 years, trustee of the Astor Library. He was a founder and first president of the Long Island Historical Society, a regent of the University of New York and a graduate of Williams College with a juris doctor degree. His literary efforts include a scholarly paper on the explorer Verrazano.

Carson's brother, Willie, joined the military, served as a major during the Civil War, and held a commission in a regiment of the New York Volunteers. He later went abroad and remained there, dying at age 81 in Nice, France. Never married, he was a member of several organizations, including the Holland Society of New York.

The collection's earliest item relates to a 17th-century land transfer concerning an early Dutch estate. Other documents in the collection bear the signatures of such luminaries as John Jacob Astor, Charles Carroll (signer of the Declaration of Independence), James Fenimore Cooper, Alexander Hamilton, Adm. Robert Peary (the renowned explorer), Sir Walter Scott, Gen. Winfield Scott and Daniel Webster.

An especially compelling document revealing the intricacies of Henry Brevoort's thought process is a letter to the controversial Gen. James Wilkinson, a Revolutionary War veteran who played a role in settling the west. In it he makes a case for building a galley (ship) for the Ohio River to protect that important passage for transporting goods. The letter is so detailed that Brevoort instructs Wilkinson on how the ship should be rigged and outfitted, down to the number of oars.

John Winslow's generosity in sharing his collection is notable. Irving observes, "He's a wealth of knowledge and the exemplification of the old-school sense of honor and kindness that you don't see too much of anymore."

– Martha Smith

Among the highlights are:

- The Stephen R. Pastore Collection on Sinclair Lewis that brings together the prize-winning author's books, recordings and articles written about him, as well as copies of correspondence and scripts. The son of a doctor and a graduate of Oberlin Academy and Yale, Lewis wrote such iconic novels as "Main Street," the Pulitzer Prize-winning "Arrowsmith," "Elmer Gantry," "Dodsworth," "It Can't Happen Here," "Cass Timberlane" and his most famous work, "Babbitt." Lewis was the first American novelist to win the Nobel Prize for Literature.

- The Whitaker Collection, comprising more than 11,000 jazz, classical and contemporary recordings, was assembled by music devotee Russell C. Whitaker. The late Mark Malkovich '93 (Hon.), former Salve Regina trustee and director of the Newport Music Festival, was instrumental in arranging the donation.

- The Hugh G. Auchincloss Collection on the Middle East reflects the donor's fascination with that part of the world from his student days until he retired from a long career in public life, which included serving as a member of President Kennedy's administration. Besides books, the collection includes pamphlets and ephemera.

- The Goelet Family Papers and the Collection on Goelet Furnishings are related assemblies of correspondence and an amazing depth of financial records relating to Ogden Goelet and his family. The bulk – including many hand-written bills and payment notices – relates to the building of Ochre Court, including the acquisition and disposal of furnishings, art and other objects purchased for Goelet's homes in New York and Newport. Ochre Court, the multi-million dollar mansion that was the setting for many lavish parties, was donated to the Diocese of Providence by Ogden's son, Robert Goelet, and his wife, Roberta, 63 years ago. The building is now the elegant flagship of Salve Regina.

- The Newport Map Collection, six plates of the city and one aerial photo, gives viewers the opportunity to zoom in for more detail via the use of a dynamic viewer.

- The Monumenta Collections are an account of the enormous Newport outdoor exhibit of 1974. This display of modern art is credited with having a lasting effect on the city's cultural scene. Included are articles, photographs, exhibit labels and an interview transcript.

Editor's Note: University archivist Maria Bernier is eager to obtain items and memorabilia from Salve Regina alumni, including photos, scrapbooks, concert programs and other mementoes such as the dance card and embossed napkins already donated. "They enrich the picture," Bernier explains. "It's a focus on the student experience." To make a donation to the archives, please contact Maria directly at maria.bernier@salve.edu, or call (401) 341-2276.



Web Exclusive: Watch a video on the Winslow collection by visiting us on the Web at: <http://www.salve.edu/news/rfn/>