

The Quill



In celebration of the life and work of
Kate Douglas Wiggin (1856-1923)

Number 1

Fall 2004

Welcome! to a brand-new news-sheet in honour of the American author Kate Douglas Wiggin. Whether you are an academic, a collector or 'just' an enthusiastic fan of Kate's many books, we aim to bring you items of literary interest from both sides of the Atlantic, as well as news from 'Quillcote', her former home in Hollis, Maine, where she is still remembered. For the next year or so, this will be a free news-sheet available for the price of a sae; we hope to expand as we get an idea of how much interest there is out there and eventually intend founding an official Kate Douglas Wiggin Society. Wiggin's work has been neglected for too long. We want to see her recognised more widely — and back in print!

Rowena Edlin-White & Carla Baade Turner

*HAPPY 100th BIRTHDAY (for
last year),
REBECCA!*



Rebecca Rowena Randall, that most endearing and enduring literary heroine of *Rebecca of Sunnybrook Farm* first appeared in 1903. Wiggin called her "the child of my heart" and she quickly planted herself in every one else's.

Jack London wrote, "She is real; she lives... I love her... Why could she not have been my daughter? Can't I adopt

her?" Sarah Orne Jewett called her, "a live, dear, genuine creature" and Frances Hodgson Burnett wrote Wiggin, "You gave me joy with Rebecca. It is a lovely dear, that book!" Other authors applauded her, grown men fell in love with her.

Rebecca of Sunnybrook Farm and the second volume, *New Chronicles of Rebecca* (pub. 1907 and sometimes called *More About Rebecca*), are the books by which Wiggin is best remembered in the UK. A blank look may be the response to "Kate Douglas Wiggin", but mention "Rebecca" and immediately the face lights up — "Ah! Rebecca!" *New Chronicles* is not a sequel to the first book, rather a series of self-contained episodes which operate in the same time-frame as *Sunnybrook Farm*. A different collection entitled, *The Flag Raising*, containing stories gleaned from both books was also published around the same time; this is now a rare item. A separate Rebecca story, *The Quilt of Happiness*, not contained in any of the above, may be found in the collection, *The Quilt of Happiness, Creeping Jenny and Other New England Stories* (1924)

There are dozens of different editions of *Rebecca* including the Mary Pickford edition and the Shirley Temple edition — illustrated with photographs from the movie versions in which these actresses starred in 1917 and 1938 respectively. Wiggin was annoyed that the Pickford version was filmed in California instead of New England and the plot altered and supplemented as a vehicle for Pickford; but it is a mercy she did not live to see the later version with a cutesy dungaree-ed Temple tap-dancing her way through numbers like "On the Good Ship Lollipop"!

Houghton Mifflin brought out a plush Centenary edition of *Rebecca of Sunnybrook Farm* last year, but spoilt it by grotesque illustrations and by making a glaring biographical mistake in the afterword.

Rebecca was named after both heroines in Sir Walter Scott's romance, *Ivanhoe*. I was recently in the little town of Ashby-de-la-Zouch in Leicestershire, which was the setting for Scott's book, and it was funny to see many houses named both for Rebecca and Rowena!

R.E-W.

News from Quillcote



Quillcote

Hollis Center, Maine

THE DORCAS FAIR

The Dorcas Society of Hollis and Buxton was founded by Wiggins and her sister, Nora Archibald Smith, in 1897 and is still going strong. Founded for the purpose of charitable works and to provide a sociable focus for the women of the area, today it helps support 3 churches, 4 small libraries, girl and boy scouts, various social projects such as battered women shelters, as well as keeping the parish house in good repair and responding to disaster funds.

Every August a grand lawn party is held in front of the old Tory Hill Meeting House at Bar Mills, offering baked goods, competitions, arts and crafts and many more attractions. It has been a high-spot every summer for more than a hundred years; Wiggins called it, "The Event Towards Which the Whole Creation Moves" and her portrait still appears on the posters — it is difficult to imagine she won't be there signing books!

This year Carla and Rowena spun and knitted umpteen hats and pairs of gloves and with two other stall-holders, raised a cool \$277.

Two books about the early days of the Dorcas Society are:

Dorcas Doings, a 36 pp booklet with Introduction by Kate, with several photographs, was issued around 1932 and gives a good background to the inauguration of the society and some of its activities.

Dorcas Dishes, a recipe book with contributions from members and Introduction by Kate was first published in 1911 but ran to several editions. Both books rare items but are worth seeking out.

The Old Peabody Pew, a story by Kate about a group of Dorcas cleaning up the church for Christmas, is a perennial favourite. Kate made it into a play in 1916 to be performed by the Dorcas for funds. It is still

presented every December at Tory Hill and will be featured in a future *Quill*.

Somewhere to Visit...

Kate spent part of every year in Britain, so it is hardly surprising that a number of her books are based in the UK. It is fascinating to follow her trail to the different places she used as background to her stories. Recently I sought out the places in *Robinetta*, a book she wrote with her friends Jane and Mary Findlater and Allan McAulay (Charlotte Stewart). The story is set in "Stoke Revel" and "Wittisham", a village "famous for its plum trees and wonderful jam". The plums gave it away: the villages are actually **Stoke Gabriel** and **Dittisham**, situated on opposite sides of the River Dart, near Totnes, in Devon. I had a most satisfactory day "Wigging" there; the line-drawings in my copy of *Robinetta* are identical to present-day views in Stoke Gabriel, and there is still a ferry over to Dittisham which cost £1 each way (it cost *Robinetta* one penny!); but alas! it was a bad year for plums and the Post Mistress told me they were no longer allowed to sell home-made jam anyway, due to stupid EC regulations!

The villages are not opposite one another as in the story; you will need to find Greenway Quay on the eastern side of the Dart to take the ferry over to Dittisham, but I promise you won't be disappointed.

The Foreroom Rug

One of Kate's short stories has already been republished in Britain in the *Woolgatherings* series. Diadema Bascom hooks a new rug for her best room from the precious remains of her childhood clothes, wedding dress and other remnants. Whilst she does so she tells her life story to her lodger, Miss Hollis. A moving story which Kate used to perform as a monologue. The description of the rug is so detailed, we were able to produce a pattern (it turned out to be a standard design spookily named, "Nottingham!") and the instructions to make it. So! Read the story and hook your own! Costs £3 inc. p&p in UK or \$8 in USA (may be sent as cash dollars at own risk) from Rowena - see address below.

What next?

If you would like to receive the next free newsletter(s), please send up to 3 stamped addressed envelopes to:

In USA: c/o Carla Turner, Quillcote, 20 Salmon Falls Rd, Hollis Center, Maine 04042.

In UK: c/o Rowena Edlin-White, Willow House, 11 Frederick Ave, Carlton, Nottingham NG4 1HP.

(Do send your comments, letters, anecdotes and requests to either of the above!)