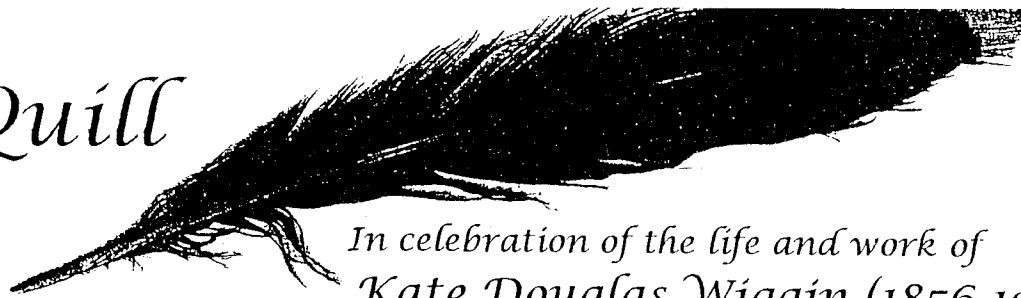


The Quill



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

Number 3

SUMMER 2005

Welcome! to the third news-sheet in honour of 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 up-to-date news from 'Quillcote', her former home in Hollis, Maine. Currently, this is a free news-sheet available for the price of a mere sae; we intend founding an official Kate Douglas Wiggin Society to coincide with her 150th birthday in 2006, and at that point, will expand the Quill into a proper journal. Like many female authors of her era, Wiggin has suffered neglect in recent years, but we intend changing all that! Already a new Penguin (US) edition of *Rebecca of Sunnybrook Farm* has been published, with an introduction by Professor Susan K. Harris of the University of Kansas, which we consider to be a hopeful sign! So keep spreading the word, and start planning a Wiggin event for September 2006, even if it's only in your back yard!
Rowena Edlin-White & Carla Baade Turner



Susanna and Sue

Recently, an ancient woven rag carpet was unearthed from the Seven Door Sitting Room at Quillcote and we speculated as to when and where it had been made. It certainly dates from Kate's time as it fitted into the bay which she had built on in the 1900s, and it is very possible that the carpet was custom-made at one of the Shaker villages in the vicinity. Wiggin knew them well and *Susanna and Sue* (1909) was inspired by the Shakers at Alfred. She stayed in the

community whilst researching this story of Susanna Hathaway, a young woman so exasperated with her husband's dissolute ways, that she leaves him, takes her little daughter, Sue, and goes to live with the Shakers at "Albion" to think things through. Susanna relishes the peace and simplicity of the community where marriage is an anathema, and is very tempted to be "gathered in" and stay. However, she comes to believe her duty is to return home, not least because she has left behind her son, Jack. As it happens, John, her husband, has come to see the error of his ways and they come together again to make a new start. A sub-plot to the story is the love affair of two young people who have been brought up by the Shakers, and who finally run away, enshewing their austere life of celibacy.

The settlement at Alfred closed in 1931, but the Friends of Alfred Shaker Museum are working to obtain a lease and restore the old carriage house on the site, currently owned by The Brothers of Christian Instruction.

In Boston last year, I bought a lovely 1909 edition of *Susanna and Sue* with decorated pages and illustrations by Alice Barber Stephens and N. C. Wyeth - and it must have been my lucky day, because there were two letters inside, one a photocopy and one original written by Sister Eva Libby, late of the Alfred community, then living at Sabbathday Lake, in the 1960s, in which she remembers Wiggin's visits to Alfred and the book she wrote "for them".

And that rag carpet? I brought a sample home to the UK and my friend, Dee Duke, painstakingly undid the faded weave to reveal gorgeous fragments of coloured print made of silk organza. Her findings have been written up in the latest issue of the *Spinster's Almanack*, available price £2.50 (or \$7-cash only) inc. p&p from Rowena (address at end).

REW

Dorcas Doings

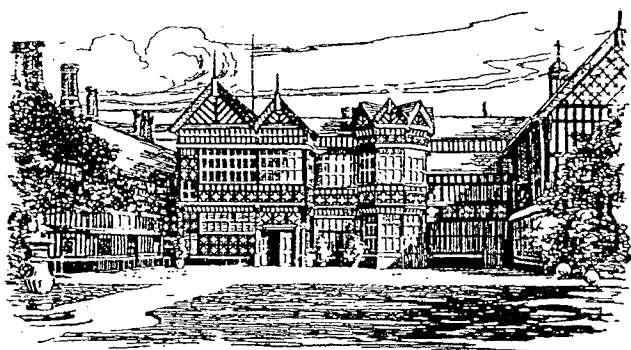
The Dorcas Society of Hollis and Buxton have been very busy lately. "Dorcas Dishes", our very own "calendar girls" 18 month Calendar will be available from July! And yes, the editors are both in there! All

done with the best possible taste, the calendar was filmed inside Quillcote and a Wiggin book, and portrait of Kate feature on each page. Copies cost £10/ \$20 inc. p&p and are available from Carla (US) and Rowena (UK). Remember! This is going to be a valuable collector's item!

Kate believed in keeping up with the times - she was the first person in Hollis to own a motor-car or a bathroom (apparently). We think she would certainly approve of the new elegant Dorcas Website - look it up on www.dorcassocietymaine.org

Great news! The Society has recently won a grant to install a special closet in the Dorcas Room to display and protect the extensive collection of Kate Douglas Wiggin memorabilia and vintage clothes. The Room has recently had a face-lift, having been redecorated by members and a new dining table was donated by Laney Manuel. If you would like to support the Dorcas - even from afar - your \$10 a year will be very welcome. Contact President Carla Turner (address below).

Somewhere to Visit...



Bramall Hall in Cheshire was one of the places Wiggin stayed on her first trip to England in 1890. Then the home of Charles and Mary Nevill, to her it must have been the epitome of an English country house. Nevill, a successful local businessman, carried out extensive refurbishment to the old Tudor Manor and it is still a beautiful building in pleasant grounds, maintained by Stockport Metropolitan Borough Council since the 1930s and open to the public.

Kate loved the carved wooden panelling, the Elizabethan wall paintings, the peacocks on the lawn and the traditional fare; she wrote about *The Beefsteak Pudding of Bramall Hall* in *Good Housekeeping* in May 1916. She revisited for many years, until the Nevills died, taking part in local

concerts for pet causes, reading from her books and singing with her sister Nora, accompanied by guitars. Kate's association with the house is recounted in *Bramall Hall: The Story of an Elizabethan Manor House* by E. Barbara Dean (1999).

Bramall Hall is in Bramhall Park, Stockport SK7 3NX, off the A5102, close to Manchester Airport.

And by the way...

In *My Garden of Memory*, Wiggin recounts how, whilst speaking at a Chautauqua meeting, she was offered a new-born baby complete with its perambulator! British readers may be unclear as to what a Chautauqua may be. They were annual non-denominational camp meetings with lectures, prayer meetings - and social opportunities - especially for young people. Wiggin never incorporated this hugely successful phenomenon into any of her stories, but one writer who did was "Pansy" or Isabella Macdonald Alden, born 1841 in Rochester, New York. *Four Girls at Chautauqua* (1876) follows the exploits of four friends who all go to Chautauqua out of very different motives, and how it affects them. *Chautauqua Girls at Home* followed in 1877 and then four more loosely connected books in the same series: *Ruth Erskine's Crosses* (1879), *Judge Burnham's Daughters* (1888), *Ruth Erskine's Son* (1907), and *Four Mothers at Chautauqua* (1913). "Pansy" herself taught at these meetings and her books were very popular in Britain as well as America, often being given as Sunday School prizes. In later years, there is a hint that sometimes - especially at Christmas - the childless Kate rather regretted not accepting that unwanted baby - and its perambulator (*My Garden of Memory* p 244).

The Forerom Rug

One of Kate's short stories, *The Forerom Rug*, has 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? Contact us!

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

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

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

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

This newsletter is distributed both in UK & USA.