From the Director:
19th century letters to a Wikipedia presence

Summer has flown by and we are well into fall semester already. With a crew of enthusiastic and capable new students on board, it promises to be a busy and productive term. I continue my work on transcribing Wylie family letters and am approaching 2,700 pages of transcription! A research leave has allowed me to work undisturbed for a total of eight weeks. As I did with my sabbatical last year, I chose to divide this work into two week intervals over the course of four months. Working undisturbed at home really allows me to make significant progress. By the end of October, I hope to have finished with the letters from the 19th century… but that may be optimistic on my part! I could not have contemplated such a leave if I did not have such a wonderful staff and corps of volunteers here. I am most appreciative of the marvelous job they have done in keeping the museum running smoothly in my absences, and I know I can always count on them to do so.

As I continue working with this collection of correspondence that is so deep and rich, I am continually struck by the wealth of information contained therein and have wondered how best to begin letting the world know about it. I hope to eventually write a biography of Louisa Wylie Boisen, daughter of Theophilus and Rebecca Wylie, since she is the central character throughout the collection. Through her, I will be able to tell everyone’s story. But realizing that that will be a long-term project, I have thought about other ways to share the stories contained in the letters. We now include more...
information about this second Wylie family when giving tours of the house. The special event that we are hosting this fall (see events) will give a tiny glimpse of the family, just a snapshot from 1852–65.

I am also working with our new graduate assistant to create a Wylie House blog that will be linked to our web site. There we can post all sorts of information about the collection. We may post a few full letters there, or excerpts and summaries. It will definitely be a place to put interesting materials that do not fall within our primary period of research and interpretation, like an account I recently came across that was written in 1936. Mrs. Bradley (granddaughter of Theophilus Wylie) and her son Morton (who bequeathed this collection to us) travelled to Europe that year and stumbled into Spain just as the Civil War was starting there! Her depictions of two ruffians running off with their baggage when they first got off the train, of being trapped in their hotel listening to gunshots being fired in the square outside, of learning that the borders were closed and they could neither retreat to Portugal or go on to some other country are so well written and entertaining that the reader is caught up in the story immediately. The blog will also be a great place, I hope, to post information for genealogical and historical researchers. For instance, we have a significant amount of correspondence written by Parke McFerson Foster, wife of John W. Foster who served in the Union Army and later was U.S. Minister to Mexico, to Russia and to Spain in the 1870s and 1880s and was U.S. Secretary of State under President Benjamin Harrison. Parke’s letters written from Vicksburg in 1865 and from Mexico in 1873 are very interesting. Or genealogists researching the Cyrus M. Dodd family might like to know that we have many letters written by Mrs. Dodd and their three daughters. You get the idea!

We are also working on building a Wikipedia presence since so many people worldwide now refer to that online resource when searching for information. By the time you read this, we will probably have our preliminary page up. As time passes, we will add more articles, links and information. It’s a challenge sometimes to carry on our historical research while also trying to stay abreast of current technology and research methods.

Before closing, I must add a note about this newsletter’s new format. As you see, we’ve taken the plunge into full color, with design help from Dennis Hill at IU Creative Services. Any peculiarities in the next few issues are due to my unfamiliarity with the new software! I hope to soon be more comfortable with it and trust that our readers will enjoy the new look.

—Jo Burgess
In keeping with our recent focus on volunteer and student involvement at Wylie House, this issue’s column provides a more in-depth profile on Mr. Lee Ridge. Lee was mentioned in the last newsletter for his volunteer work in our heirloom garden but he’s made significant contributions to our research efforts here as well. Because of Lee’s curiosity and tenacity, we’ve created a new database of old newspaper articles that mention Wylie family members and their activities. To date it contains over 2,500 entries spanning 1825 to 1960. The majority of this information has come from Lee over the past three years.

Lee spends considerable time in the Indiana Room at the Monroe County Public Library looking at microfilm of past newspapers published in Bloomington. Every few weeks during the late spring, summer and fall, he drops off a bundle of items that mention the Wylie family. Through these we’ve been able to further verify and extend our knowledge of the two Wylie families that lived here, and their descendants.

We’ve learned more about family birth, graduation, marriage, and death dates, their careers and comings and goings, and about important family celebrations. We’ve also acquired more information about Wylie family and extended family businesses, land ownership, political offices, and litigious matters. We have, for example, compiled a folder of articles pertaining to a grandson-in-law of Andrew Wylie’s who graduated from the IU Law School, was involved in several local businesses, ran into trouble as Bloomington’s City Treasurer during the early 20th century but ended up owning and operating the biggest turkey farm nationally of its day near Ellettsville!

Lee’s roots in Washington Township go back to 1828 when his great-grandfather, a cabinet maker, moved here from Wythe County, Virginia. Coincidentally, that was the same year the Indiana Seminary was re-chartered as a College, and Andrew Wylie was asked to serve as its first president. It wasn’t until 1989 when Lee retired from Sarkes Tarzian that he began to pursue his interest in local history in earnest.

“I was interested in my family, of course, our neighbors, and about a lot of the older family names I’d heard people mention that are associated with our part of the township. I’ve run into lots of brick walls, I can tell you, but I enjoy it.” Over the years Lee has amassed enough information to fill countless three-ring binders that are housed in 15-foot shelving units. He is known as one of the foremost historians of his church near the former town of Wayport, and also contributed to the recent publication, Echoes from One-Room Schools of Monroe County, Indiana. “Yes, I had my finger in that pie too,” he told me recently when discussing the book. It was Lee’s daughter-in-law who suggested that he volunteer in the Wylie House garden. “That was about four years ago. I was looking for a way to get more exercise and to be outside. It was another year, though, before I got interested in the Wylies.” With another database well launched, we are delighted that Lee has gotten his fingers into yet another pie. Bon Appétit!

—Bridget Edwards

Another dedicated garden volunteer

Special thanks go to KIZZI LITTLE, a business student majoring in apparel merchandising at IUB. Responding to a call for help posted to the Bloomington Volunteer Network, Kizzi spent the summer working on a daily basis in the Wylie House garden. She received practical experience in all aspects of the heirloom seed saving program, planting, weeding, collecting and cleaning seeds, and preparing them for sale. “I enjoy the work,” said Kizzi, “being part of something people can buy that will give back, and having a chance to collect seeds and spread them on to friends and family.”

—Sherry Wise
Student Involvement at Wylie House

It appears that Wylie House has gained a reputation among students in IU’s School of Library and Information Science (SLIS) as a good place to get hands-on work experience for those interested in archives, special collections, and museums! We are pleased to welcome four new students to Wylie House this fall: a graduate assistant, two graduate student interns, and one hourly student employee. In addition, our summer graduate intern has returned as a volunteer. We had more inquiries about openings than we could accommodate and all indications are that we will have a full house in spring semester as well. These young people are a great boon to our operation as they are so very capable and are always familiar with the latest technology and computer programs. We are also very pleased to be able to so actively support the academic mission of the University by providing useful experience to these students.

Jeremy Floyd is our new graduate assistant and will be with us for both spring and fall semesters. Jeremy, originally from Las Vegas, recently completed a Masters Degree in Anthropology at Western Michigan University and is now working on a second masters degree in Library and Information Science with an Archives specialization. He hopes for a career as an archivist in either a university or museum. Among other things, Jeremy will be helping us design and write a page in Wikipedia about the museum and the Wylie families. He will also help update our web site and launch a blog that will be linked to that site.

Eric Holt is another second year SLIS student with a specialization in archives. With a B.A. degree in history from Seattle University, Eric would like to work for NARA or some other large archival repository after he graduates from IU. While at the Wylie House, he will work on our database projects and organize and catalog our collection of ephemera, among other things.

Amanda Wismer was our summer intern. Yet another SLIS student with an archives specialization, Amanda has an undergraduate degree from Miami University in Ohio in secondary education. She will graduate in December and hopes to find a career in a history museum. During her internship, Amanda cataloged photographs, pamphlets and three-dimensional objects and added photographic images to catalog records. She also filled out condition reports on 19th century books in our collection and worked on our letters database. Amanda has generously returned as a volunteer this semester to continue her work on the database.

Erin Dobias is a second year SLIS student with an Archives specialization. Originally from Fort Wayne, IN, she got her undergraduate degree in Anthropology from the College of William and Mary. Erin's work in the library there led her to consider getting a degree in Library Science. She hopes to one day work in a large ethnographic museum in a large city. Erin is working on some of our database projects and cataloging materials in our archival collection.

Caitlin Bagley is our student hourly employee this semester. A beginning student in SLIS, Caitlin comes to us with a degree in English and Classics from the University of Kentucky. She will be spending most of her time at the IU Archives working with the Theophilus A. Wylie diaries from the 1860s and 1870s. He often wrote a few words or occasionally several sentences in Latin and many of those passages have never been translated. If she can decipher his handwriting, which is sometimes very difficult, she will do the translation for us.

Bringing History Home · 4
December open house
Our annual December open house will occur on Saturday, December 6 this year, from 5 until 8 p.m. As is usual, we will be here in period attire to welcome our guests for a candlelit evening of music, games, light refreshments, and talk about the Wylie families.

Quilt exhibit
Our annual March quilt exhibit will open, as is usual, with a three-day open house that coincides with the Indiana Heritage Quilt Show at the Bloomington Convention Center. On March 5, 6 and 7, 2009, the museum will be open from 10 a.m. until 4 p.m. and visitors will conduct themselves through the house to admire the 24–30 quilts that will be on display. Guided tours of the museum will resume on Tuesday, March 10 with normal hours, 10 a.m. until 2 p.m., and the quilts will remain on display throughout the month.

Art of Theophilus Wylie
Throughout the month of April 2009 there will be a Wylie House exhibit in the lobby of the Wells Library on the campus of IU Bloomington. The drawings of Theophilus A. Wylie, his children and grandchildren will be featured in the exhibit cases on the west wall of the lobby. We have enjoyed these whimsical sketches and drawings as we have come across them on the inside covers of books, the backs of envelopes and on scraps of paper and we wanted to share some of our favorites with the public.

Volunteering
- Do you like history, antiques and a pleasant, tranquil setting? Learn to be a docent at the Wylie House.
- Have limited time? Help with special events at the museum.
- Do you prefer to spend your time in the garden? Lend a hand in our heirloom garden.

If you live in the Bloomington area and would like to become more actively involved with the museum, please call and chat with us about the opportunities.

Docents, volunteers, and interns
Susan Baker, Eric Bartheld, Nancy Boerner, Sidney Bolan, Jane Clay, Erin Dobias, Roseann Dodds, Anthony Eller, Mary Emison, Anne Fierst, Jane Harnett, Eric Holt, Naomi Lawlis, Mary Anne Miller, Sarah Noggle, Patsy Rahn, Cindy Smith, Carla Williams, Amanda Wismer

Garden volunteers
Sidney Bolan, Roseann Dodds, Kizzi Little, Ross Hill, Lee Ridge, Floyd Richards, Barbara Roberts, Eve Schultes-Ridge, Martha Tarbah, Kathie Wallskog, Daniel Williams

Quilters
Marjorie Clayton, Diamond Mather, Virginia Miller, Ellen Pittman
Mural to be painted

We have for several years spoken to our visitors about the scenic mural that we planned to have painted in the entry hall of Wylie House. This winter, that mural will finally be executed. Local artist John Thom, who did the stenciling in the parlor and much of the rest of the painting in the museum, has been commissioned to do this work for us. Donations from the Wylie House staff and volunteers will cover most of the cost. The mural will depict the first IU buildings at Seminary Square and other buildings known to exist in the early Bloomington landscape. The work will be completed before the museum opens for its 2009 season.

Education center update

We were disappointed this past June when the bids for our new education center came in higher than expected. However, we have not given up on this project. We are currently working on another approach to get this much needed center designed and built and are still very hopeful that it can be done within the next 18 to 24 months. We will continue to keep our friends informed of our progress and plans.