

HUNTIA

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HUNTIA is a yearbook devoted to studies of the literature on systematic botany and horticulture, botanical voyages and explorations, early agriculture, medical botany, and the related subjects of botanical biography, iconography, and bibliography.

While HUNTIA serves primarily as a record of investigations at The Hunt Botanical Library, its pages are open also to papers from scholars of other institutions.

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Rachel McMasters Miller Hunt—1882-1963

George H. M. Lawrence

“Now Roy, I want to make one thing clear at the start. I don’t want any aluminum in my Penthouse!”

The demand, straight from the shoulder, was Rachel Hunt’s opening statement at an early conference with her husband, Roy Arthur Hunt, and the architects selected to design the Hunt Library building. It was addressed to a man who for more than a quarter-century had headed the Aluminum Company of America, world leader in the industry, a man who lived and breathed in terms of aluminum, and who, as she well knew, had no thought of using for the new building any other metal than aluminum where that alloy might serve. It was a brave and forthright statement which exemplifies the personality and character of an extraordinary woman.

Rachel Hunt was a small woman, scarcely five feet tall. She was a woman with strong convictions which she expressed without hesitation. Perceptive and exceedingly intelligent, she thought with alacrity and spoke incisively. With tastes that were cultivated and trained by long exposure to excellence, she knew exactly what she wanted, her penchant was for perfection, and she would brook gracefully few compromises with her convictions. Always one to fulfill a commitment beyond the expected, she was intolerant of the half-measure or the diluted effort. Sensitive and aesthetic, almost to a fault, to all that was artistic, she was also intensely feminine. Yet, almost to the end she was a woman of great stamina, of amazing vigor, and dynamism; a woman who, with doughty grit at eighty would climb the flights of a winding staircase to see a book long coveted; a woman whose knowledge of literature and of the arts was of amazing depth, and of an all encompassing scope. When conversing in areas of mutual interest, one’s awareness of her grasp of a subject was immediate, and her enthusiasm was infectious; that she was well-read was obvious, and that she enjoyed complete catholicity of taste for all things that were fine was equally patent. All who knew her realized that there was little in her that was provincial. She was indeed a cultured woman. For those who know the library Penthouse that she planned through many a night, that she furnished with exquisite taste and



Fig. 1. Rachel McMasters Miller Hunt.

Photo by Kenneth Morton, 1962

forethought—and also with its abundance of beautiful aluminum, finished so skillfully to simulate the bronze she first preferred—it must be conceded surely that the above opening quotation does embody, and does exemplify and reflect many of the qualities that were Rachel Hunt. Her passing, on 22 February 1963, in her 81st year, just four days after being the ever-gracious hostess at a lively birthday party in her brother's honor, terminated a career of truly outstanding accomplishment. It is proper that some facets of this career be summarized in this first volume of a new journal named in her honor.

The only daughter and elder of two children of Mortimer and Rachel McMasters Miller, she was born June 30, 1882, in Turtle Creek, Pa., a coal-mining borough about fifteen miles east of Pittsburgh. Her father, a graduate of Princeton and lawyer by profession, was a specialist in maritime and riparian law. He was this at a time when Pittsburgh was a dominant industrial port, with a burgeoning river traffic that fed into the Mississippi River and beyond, at a time when floods contributed to litigation, and when power-producing water rights were all-important and were contested. As Rachel Miller, she attended private schools in Pittsburgh and Cleveland, and would later express deep regrets for not having utilized the opportunities that were then hers for collegiate studies. While yet in her teens she went more than once to Europe with her parents, visited and knew many of the treasures of the Continent's cultural centers, knew intimately the spas and resorts, and learned early her French and later her Italian.

Known today for her bibliophilic tastes and her book-collecting accomplishments, it was at the age of fifteen when she received her first book worthy of note, one now in this library that bears her name—a first edition of Leonard Meager's *The English gardener*, printed in London in 1670. Even then, she since told us, she was definitely an out-doors type of girl, one who loved to be in her Grandmother McMaster's garden, to sit quietly there in the crotch of an apple tree while watching a hummingbird on its nest. She sought eagerly to learn of the nature about her, and to learn the names of the wildflowers and trees. She later prided herself on knowing the Latin names of the species grown in her gardens, and of the wildflowers, and in her later years would chide the visiting botanist who would condescend to use vernacular names of plants when Latin names were more precise. Throughout her life, her love for nature and all that composed it received as much of her interest as did her love for literature and the arts.

Some index to the breadth of her interests, apart from her first-love of botanical and horticultural literature, is to be had from a summary of her activities in various organizations. In 1907 she participated in founding, in

New York, The Guild of Book Workers, an organization that today has nearly 100 members, most of whom are highly skilled professional and amateur bookbinders. She was a charter member and ex-president of the Garden Club of Allegheny County (founded in 1916). At the time of her death she was one of the last surviving founding members of the American Society of Bookplate Designers and Collectors (founded in 1922), and her own collection of bookplates—of which the oldest example dates from 1489—numbers more than 6,000 specimens, largely of American or British origin. She was a founding member of the Limited Editions Club, and was active in its early years in the promotion of works that would reflect the best in typography, fine printing, and the graphic arts. As one of six founders in 1944 of the Hroswitha Club, of New York City, she was active in bringing together a group of women outstanding in this country for their book collecting activities, and served as its President from 1949 to 1953. Long a very active member of the Garden Club of America, she was a director from 1934 to 1939 and served as its book review editor from 1937 to 1957. Her last organizational activity was to participate in 1962 in the founding of the Pittsburgh Bibliophiles, now a very active group of more than 100 collectors and lovers of fine and rare books.

The services rendered by Mrs. Hunt, spread over a half-century of activity, were recognized in later years by a mantle of many honors. For conciseness of presentation, they are enumerated below:

- Bulkley Gold Medal, Garden Club of America, 1944
- Election to membership in the Distinguished Daughters of Pennsylvania, 1951
- Gold Achievement Medal, Garden Club of America, 1952
- Certificate of Award, Authors' Club of Pittsburgh, Pa., 1954
- Honorary Doctor of Laws degree, University of Pittsburgh, Pa., 1954
- Honorary Vice President, American Horticultural Society, 1956
- Honorary Member, Zonta International, Pittsburgh Branch, 1956
- Distinguished Service Award, New York Botanical Garden, 1956
- Gold Medal, Massachusetts Horticultural Society, 1958
- Certificate of Merit, Pennsylvania Horticultural Society, 1958
- Citation of Honor, American Civic Association, Washington, D. C., 1959
- Gold Owl Pin, National League of Pen Women (Pittsburgh, Pa. Chapter), 1959
- Roll of Honor Member, National Society of Colonial Dames of America, 1959
- "Woman of the Year" for 1959. Pittsburgh, Pa., 1959
- Gold National Medal of Honor, Herb Society of America, 1959
- Honorary Doctor of Humane Letters, Carnegie Institute of Technology, 1960
- Honorary Member, The Pittsburgh Bibliophiles, Pittsburgh, Pa., 1963

She served for many years as an elected trustee of the Associates of Yale Medical Library, and of the John Carter Brown Library of Brown University. In 1960 she was a member of the founding committee for the Carl

Purington Rollins Printing Office of the Yale University Press—a special unit for the promotion and production of works to exemplify the finest in typography and printing. In Pittsburgh she was active in its women's Twentieth Century Club where she occupied various offices. Through her membership in The Manuscript Society, of New York, she joined with others in fostering and stimulating interest in the collection and preservation of autograph letters and manuscripts, and through this interest assembled a collection of more than 400 letters of nearly 200 botanists and horticulturists—items which, for the most part, originated prior to 1850.

Mrs. Hunt was the author of the book *William Penn, horticulturist*, published by the University of Pittsburgh Press (1953), and of scores of articles in the periodical literature. She was the sponsor of two small volumes, published as a boxed pair, which represented the first publication of two anonymously written 17th century English manuscript notebooks: *Soyle for an orchard* and *Husbandry*, designed and privately printed for her in a limited edition of 310 copies by Carl Purington Rollins of the Yale University Press, New Haven, Connecticut, November 1952. These works, of exceptional beauty, are now much sought after as collector's items—both for the historical uniqueness of their contents, and as examples of fine printing. In addition, Mrs. Hunt planned the organization of *The catalogue of botanical books in the collection of Rachel McMasters Miller Hunt*, a continuing work and the first for this field to embody the principles of analytical bibliographical investigation; volume one, compiled by Jane Quinby, was published in 1958, and volume two, compiled by Allan H. Stevenson, in 1961. The work is a limited edition of 750 copies published by The Hunt Foundation and distributed to the world's leading botanical and bibliographical centers.

In addition to her several bibliophilic collections, one sees in her home today other collections that reveal the breadth of her interests in the arts. Flemish tapestries of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, rich in floral or unicorn motifs, adorn the walls of many rooms and walls. Among her fine rugs, none was more prized than her Ispahans and Karabaghs, together with a few choice Aubusson's and Savonneries from the seventeenth century looms in Aubusson. One sitting room was converted into what is virtually a display room for her very extensive *terre de pipe* collection of platinum-decorated Langeais pottery, delicately glazed and now rare, often basket-like in its patterns, and first made on the Isle of Jersey but later in or near the French town of Langeais from which it gets its name.

Time surely will prove Rachel McMasters Miller Hunt's greatest legacy to be the botanical library that bears her name. A library which in 1961, she and Roy Arthur Hunt gave to Carnegie Institute of Technology, and with

it also the commodious quarters and furnishings that provide for these collections an environment of magnificence reminiscent of her own library. The gift is a library comprised of many collections, described in some detail in the illustrated volume published on the occasion of its dedication (*The Rachel McMasters Miller Hunt botanical library. Its collections, program, and staff.* 36 pp. Pittsburgh, Pa., 1961). It is a group well represented by herbals and the later works of medical botany, by volumes on early agriculture (mid-nineteenth century and earlier), by botanical colorplate works of all periods and languages, and by botanical and horticultural books in English and other languages she could read (French, Italian, and Latin), by books on voyages and travel, and to a lesser extent by works on landscape design. Added to these was her collection of portraits of botanists executed primarily in the pre-photography era. In the field of botanical art and illustration she had brought together more than 3,000 water colors, 2,400 prints, and some 400 black and white drawings. These, plus the collections of autograph letters and manuscripts, of medals and other memorabilia commemorating past botanists, and of fine porcelains and *objets d'art* associated with botanical materials, exemplify the areas to which Mrs. Hunt had given diligent study and on which she was an authority of magnitude.

In the two decades prior to World War II, and that immediately following, she gave many lectures across the country—to both the public and to horticultural organizations—on the subjects of her collections, often in association with exhibitions of her books, or of selections from her botanical prints and paintings. Among the more noteworthy exhibitions, and for several of which printed catalogues were prepared, were those at Carnegie Institute, Pittsburgh, Pa., the Cincinnati Institute of Fine Arts, Cincinnati, Ohio, The Clements Library, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, Michigan, The Grolier Club, New York, The Henry E. Huntington Library and Museum, San Marino, California, the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York City, the National Gallery of Art, Washington, D. C., the Rhode Island School of Design, Providence, R. I., the University of Virginia, Charlottesville, Va. (sponsored by the Bibliographical Society of Virginia), and the Yale University Library, New Haven, Connecticut. Catalogues were prepared and published for her larger exhibitions. Three catalogues issued in connection with these exhibitions continue to be consulted for their comprehensiveness and notes: that for the Carnegie Institute exhibit, compiled by Jane Quinby, *Botanical books, prints, and drawings from the collection of Mrs. Roy Arthur Hunt* (1951), that for the Clements Library exhibit, by Prof. Harley H. Bartlett, *Fifty-five rare books from the botanical library of Mrs. Roy Arthur Hunt* (1949), and that for the University of Virginia exhibit, by Ruth Evelyn Byrd,

Exhibition catalogue; books, drawings, prints from the botanical collection of . . . (1952).

Mrs. Hunt was a bibliophile in every sense of the term. She collected books and manuscripts in many fields beyond those associated with the plant sciences. In 1937, she and Mr. Hunt added a fireproof wing to their residence, to provide an adequate library, replete with a walk-around balcony, a canvas mural of Carcassone, and an adjoining stack section. Here she shelved her collection of some 6,000 volumes of botanical and horticultural works. Within the week after their removal to the new library built for them at Carnegie Institute of Technology, those empty shelves were filled with her lifetime collections of books in other subject areas, and in which she was equally well-read and informed; collections that had occupied every available space elsewhere in her home. These included many first editions of English and American literature, fine bindings of known craftsmen, private press works exemplifying the best of fine printing and typography, a very considerable suite of early cookbooks, another suite in the field of American history—and strong in that of her beloved Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, and lastly several sections of works relating to the fine arts, including those on *objets d'art* and that aspect of numismatics that is concerned with medals and medalists (her collection of medals was itself very considerable).

It was with pride that Mrs. Hunt would say that her library in its broadest sense was built book by book. She never had an agent, nor did she work through any handful of dealers. For decades the weekly mail included scores of dealers' and auction catalogues; these she pored over, often in the small hours of the morning when sleep was only a desire, debating whether to buy or not to buy—and sometimes losing the item to another who got there first. Such loss was not due to procrastination, but to honest indecision on the merit of a book, the fairness of its price, and its importance to her. It was a common but wholly honest cliché when she would repeat a family saying that, "I would rather buy an old book than a new fur coat." Nothing pleased her more than the gift of an example of fine printing, and certainly nothing touched her more than when, at eighty, a Christmas gift from her husband was one leaf from the first book printed from movable type; the 42-line *Biblia Latina*, otherwise known as the Gutenberg Bible.

The appreciation and love for fine printings, fine bindings, and exquisite press productions came to Rachel Hunt early in life. The story of how she became a fine bookbinder in her own right deserves documentation. Always a member of what is today termed the affluent society, Rachel Miller in her late teens was a young woman who had completed finishing school

studies, had enjoyed her "Cinderella Ball," was attached to no particular beau or beaux, and was one who within herself must have felt strongly the drives and determinations to be more than a dilettante or socialite. The opportunity came when a family acquaintance somewhat older than she returned from a year's apprenticeship in one of London's finest binderies, Cobden-Sanderson's Doves Bindery, at Hammersmith. This was Miss Euphemia Bakewell, a member of Pittsburgh's well-known Bakewell glass family. Some of her bindings, discreetly monogrammed E. B. inside the back covers, are now in Mrs. Hunt's collection here at Carnegie Institute of Technology. Mrs. Hunt described Euphemia Bakewell as a tall young woman, with strong traits of masculinity, blunt and positive in her attitudes, and as one who was indeed a plain but highly cultured woman. When asked by Rachel Miller if she would set up a bindery in Pittsburgh, Miss Bakewell's tart reply was "Never! Pittsburgh has no culture. There is nobody in this mill town who would know a fine binding if he saw it, nor would know how to care for it if he had it! I'm returning to New York, and will open a bookbinding school there." This was about 1900.

Rachel Miller had seen the bindings Euphemia Bakewell had brought back with her and had seen the drawings that had preceded the execution of the many that were her own work; others were examples by British and French masters. A chord was struck. Here, in these examples of creativity and tangible accomplishment Rachel Miller saw her opportunity to be herself: to be creative, to be her own master, to accomplish, and—without offense to any—to escape what to her might have been the boredom of her social stratum. She went to Miss Bakewell and pleaded with her to remain in Pittsburgh and to hold here a class in bookbinding. Miss Bakewell was adamant; Pittsburgh was impossible. New York was for her. Miss Miller was persistent. Pittsburgh, she argued, needed the opportunity; "try it for one year," she urged. As if in answer to the challenge, Miss Bakewell agreed, on the condition that Rachel would find five or six persons who would enroll in such an apprenticeship and who would pay in advance their fee for the entire course. Rachel Miller found the apprentices. The training course began. In a few weeks all had dropped out but one. Rachel alone remained. She loved the work and became highly proficient from the private lessons received for the remainder of that winter!

A small bindery was set up in her home, and she continued to work on her own. The following summer T. J. Cobden-Sanderson (1879-1922) visited Euphemia Bakewell in Pittsburgh, met Rachel Miller, saw the work she had done, and was so impressed with her potential that he invited her to come to Hammersmith, the London suburb, there to study under him. This

she did, staying at his Doves Bindery for nearly a year, and terminating her training with some additional weeks in Paris where she concentrated on the finer art of gilding and finishing. While at Hammersmith she met men who had worked with William Morris, whose then relatively recent death had ended the work of the famed Kelmscott Press, she watched Cobden-Sanderson's own typographical work at the adjoining Doves Press, visited other private presses, binderies, and what is now the J. Barcham Greene paper mill, at Hayle Mill, in Kent. Personal contact with all facets of fine book production, imbued her with a spirit of perfection, which, she insisted, must be impregnated into every production conceived and executed as a work of art. Assuredly it was this saturation, at a most formative period in her young life, with ideals and standards of perfection that contributed so much to her becoming a skillful practitioner and an enlightened patroness of the arts.

On her return to Pittsburgh she set up an adequate bindery, bringing back with her many of the decorative brass tools and the alphabets that were to be the media for her expression of creative genius—later adding to them by acquiring many that had been Cobden-Sanderson's own. Her serious bookbinding activity began with her return in 1903—she named her shop the Lehar Bindery, an anagram of Rachel—and ended with the birth of her firstborn, Alfred Miller Hunt, in 1919 (one nearly completed binding is dated by her as 1920). During this period, with time out for family trips to Europe and elsewhere, for a summer's honeymoon in Europe in 1913, and for trips with her husband to many places (including an extended canoe trip in the Maine wilderness), she designed on paper and produced in full leather nearly ninety bindings. Most of these were for her own satisfaction and personal collection; of the dozen or so that were done on commission for others (at a respectable fee), several have found their way back by gift or purchase to the present collection. Her bindings can all be identified, as can also Euphemia Bakewell's, as examples of the Cobden-Sanderson school; the spine usually has five to seven corded panels, the leather is finely and painstakingly finished to a high polish, and the letters are applied individually and never with the machine-like uniformity produced by brass type when set in a hand-held pallete. She identified herself with each of her bindings on the lower inside edge of the back cover where appears her initials, and year of execution. From 1908 onward (but only uniformly so after mid-1911), she added also the imprint of a resting lamb (and woe to anyone who, like myself, once and only once, indelicately referred to it as a "sheep"). This identifying mark, she explained, was suggested to her by her father, who reminded her that in Hebrew, Rachel

meant "ewe," a female sheep or lamb. Thereafter she always had a sentimental affection for a lamb; whether it was as her mark of identification, the Vegetable (or Scythian) lamb of Tartary, or one gamboling on a hillside. Later, at her suggestion, the imprint of the same reclining lamb was incorporated in the seal of this library, there taking precedence over her fondness for the flowering stem of the crown imperial (*Fritillaria imperialis*) incorporated in the cover design and in the watermark of papers used in many of her books, and in the more recent productions from this library (including this volume). As concerns her bookbindings, her crowning glory came in 1961, when the British Museum invited her to contribute one of her bindings to its collections, noting that they would be honored to have one by an American woman. This she did, and was further enchanted many months later to find it on display amid bindings of the acknowledged masters from the world over.

In the succeeding years it was her children and family that dominated all competition for her time and attention. There were summers with them in the White Mountains of New Hampshire and at the oceanside at Watch Hill, Rhode Island. There were the trips to and from St. Paul's School in New Hampshire and Choate School in Connecticut. There were the numerous dinner parties at the family's Pittsburgh home, when unstinted hospitality was extended to art exhibition jurors and to visiting artists, to world famous guest soloists and performers in Pittsburgh's programs of ballet, opera, and symphony, and to many among the men and women who were then producing America's literature.

During World War II, with three sons in military service in the Far East and another in a war plant in northern New York state, she set other activities aside to devote much of her time as a daily worker in downtown Pittsburgh's USO canteen. In later years, when again time and energy enabled her to participate in organizational activities at local and national levels, Mrs. Hunt often expressed her regret for having no guest-book record of the very considerable number of great and not so great who over the years had crossed her threshold, graced her table, and joined that ever widening circle of friends with whom she and her husband continued to maintain contact.

Such a person was Rachel McMasters Miller Hunt. And such were her accomplishments. But there was another side, known to but few of her bibliophilic and horticultural associates, but known intimately by many who conversely knew little of such cultural pursuits. It was the Rachel Hunt who was the warm, genuinely affectionate, loving, understanding woman. It was the Rachel Hunt who, out of unadulterated consideration

for others would pay a welcoming visit to a newcomer or new bride in the neighborhood; who, with simple note or flower, remembered an anniversary, who remembered the invalid and the shut-in; who, with passion for anonymity, made possible the completion of schooling for a deserving student, and who quietly provided for an operation in days when medical insurance was non-existent; and it was the Rachel Hunt who, to so many persons and for so many years extended the spirit of Christmas throughout the year with personal consideration for the needs of the individual. Her multitude of kindnesses, extended so quietly, were engendered wholly from the heart; never were they acts of largesse, and rarely were they discussed with, or even known to, her own family. These, with her love and concern for her family, were her abiding interests of many decades.

In addition to her husband, Roy Arthur Hunt, she is survived by a brother Torrence Miller, by four sons, and eleven grandchildren. Her passing will long be mourned by all who knew her, and the loss of her influence in a community of friends, as well as of bibliophiles, is conspicuous. There is satisfaction, however, in knowing that this botanical library, in its new home and, as the *modus operandus* for a new institution, was planned and enjoyed by her in the last years of her life. To the end she would visit it regularly, was well informed on its plans and progress, sought to know every member of its growing staff and to be informed about each family, and, while scrupulously avoiding any semblance of interference in its administration, was ever available for counsel. Aside from her family, none may miss her more than do we who sat at her feet in the formative years of this new library activity, who no longer are fledglings in the nest, and who no longer have a Mrs. Hunt to turn to for advice.

