

# CHILDREN'S LITERATURE

from the *SPECIAL COLLECTIONS* of the  
*Julia Rogers Library*

**P**UBLISHING IN EARNEST FOR CHILDREN was a response to changing attitudes toward young people and their education in the late 18th century. John Locke (1632–1704) and Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712–78) both wrote profoundly about “children’s distinctive needs,” and about childhood as a period distinct from infancy and adulthood—a time for enjoyment as well as learning. In Britain in particular the growing middle class and its educators were quick to respond to these observations.

The career path of London’s enterprising John Newbery, who is credited with opening the first major press and bookstore specifically for children’s books, is evocative of what the early stages of publishing for children must have been like. He started his career as an apprentice to a printer, eventually married his boss’s widow, continued the business, printing a newspaper and compounding and selling medicines, as well. One writer even compared his operation to that of a country store. Eventually he added to these activities the writing and publication of little books for children, and actually hired noted authors to produce more works for him, including *The Little Pretty Pocket Book*, 1744, and *Little Goody Two-Shoes* in 1765.

Once the publishing of children’s books became established as a recognized genre some 200 years ago, children’s books evolved in content and appearance in lockstep with changes elsewhere in society: with the increasing level of adult literacy, with western society’s ever-widening commercial interests, with technological advances in the printing industry, and with the ever-growing acceptance of childhood as a phase of human development to be enjoyed, an attitude which became particularly marked among well-to-do Victorians.

Wave after wave of designers, illustrators, writers and publishers created products they hoped would delight and hold the attention of youngsters. Following the fashions and trends of their times, utilizing the technologies available to them, they produced wonderful books, toys and games intended to instruct and entertain, as is reflected in this small exhibition of children’s literature from the Special Collections of Goucher’s Julia Rogers Library.

The exhibition begins with a look at the contribution made to the publishing of children’s books in this century by Nancy Larrick Crosby, Goucher, Class of 1930.

## Case I

**Nancy Larrick Crosby**

**“One of the Seventy Women Who Have Made a Difference in the World of Books” \***

**N**ANCY LARRICK GRADUATED from Goucher College at nineteen years (Class of 1930), and became an English teacher like her mother, also named Nancy Larrick, and also a Goucher alumna (Class of 1903). She served the College as a Trustee from 1962-1974. In 1988, the Goucher College Fund for Excellence in Teaching was established by Nancy Larrick Crosby.

*Nancy Larrick—in Her Own Words*

“I grew up in the small town of Winchester, Virginia, just two blocks from the public library, a

magnificent Beaux Arts building, now listed as ‘A National Treasure.’ There was no children’s room, and no children’s librarian, but we flocked to that imposing building and happily clattered up the winding black iron stairway which we knew led to books for us.

I am sure my addiction to that library and its treasures resulted from growing up in a reading family. There were always books and magazines in our house, plus two daily newspapers...both my father and mother read to me—animal stories, folk tales, and poetry, in particular...I realize now that I

got much of my love of books by ear. This continued into high school, where our English teacher (undoubtedly the best teacher I have ever had) read aloud to us every day—rhythmically, dramatically, convincingly. Poetry was my love.”

### *Nancy Larrick and Reading to Children*

Long before a young child can read for himself, he listens to adults read to him. The rhythm and beat of the rhymes, the melody of language, often bring pleasurable sensations even before he understands their meaning.

Nancy Larrick’s stepson recalled that “Children loved to have (her) read to them (because) when the book’s characters roared, she would, too!”

“Like a song, a poem is meant to be read,” Nancy Larrick wrote. “Often the appeal of the song depends on the singer. We are captivated when the words are enunciated clearly, when the timing and tone seem to fit the mood. Young listeners welcome the voice of a lively reader, not fiercely dramatic, but with the ups and downs of real conversation, or the whisper-soft of bedtime, or the slow-and-scary of an approaching boa constrictor perhaps—always with the warmth of the friendly reader.”

### *Nancy Larrick and Reading Education*

Children and reading were Nancy Larrick’s passions, and immediately after college she plunged into her lifelong effort to bring them together. As a young English teacher, during annual visits to her eighth graders’ homes, she saw that there was a direct correlation between the degree of parental involvement and the reading level of the child. So she vigorously urged parents to partner with her in encouraging good reading habits.

Larrick considered the standard reading workbooks of the 1950s, with their picture games and stories about Dick and Jane, insulting to even a five year old’s intelligence. She preferred Dr. Seuss and Little Bear, for example. During the ‘50s, while serving as Education Director of Children’s Books at Random House, Larrick asserted in a New York Times book review her belief that children “can hear the rhythm of beautifully turned phrases and follow the suspense of a good story line.” Her dissertation for her doctorate at NYU (1955) became the foundation of her first book, *A Parent’s Guide to Children’s Reading*. Published in 1958 and reprinted five times, it was so popular in fact that it was referred to as the “Dr. Spock” of children’s reading.

Sequels include *A Teacher’s Guide to Children’s Books* (1963) and nine other books for parents and teachers. Altogether, Nancy Larrick wrote or edited

nearly thirty books for young people, including more than twenty poetry anthologies.

### *Nancy Larrick Crosby, Wife and Colleague*

In 1958, Nancy Larrick married Alexander L. Crosby, a journalist, with whom she collaborated on several non-fiction books. She continued to use her maiden name professionally. Both became adjunct professors of education at Lehigh University in the 1960s. Nancy Larrick often penned tributes to her husband on the front pages of her books, such as this one:

“Most important—my husband—Alexander Leviticus, who made it possible.” *Crazy to be Alive in Such a Strange World*, a 1977 anthology of “Poems about People” selected by Nancy Larrick, was illustrated with photographs taken by Alexander Crosby in various parts of the U.S. as well as England, France, Mexico, Peru and East Africa.

### *Nancy Larrick and Poetry*

“In my early years as a classroom teacher, I enrolled in a graduate course in Modern American Poetry, and was swept off my feet by such poets as Robert Frost, Carl Sandburg, Langston Hughes, and Edna St. Vincent Millay. Often I would let my enthusiasm spill over to my eighth graders, and they asked for more. I learned to respect their taste and judgment, and became certain they were captivated by the sound of poetry.

“By the mid-1960s, I was teaching in the Graduate School of Education of Lehigh University. As an adjunct professor I was encouraged to experiment and, not surprisingly, took flight with a workshop in Poetry for Children. Most of my students were very talented in-service teachers, each with a class of 25 to 30 six- to twelve-year olds.

“This was a time when poetry for children and by children was on the upsurge. As one critic of the 1960s put it: “Somebody turned on a tap in these kids, and the poetry just kept coming.” In our university workshops we sang and chanted poems, we moved to the rhythm of poetry, we dramatized poems, we wrote poems. Out of these Lehigh Workshops came a book for parents and teachers: *Let’s Do a Poem!*

“At about this time I was asked to compile an anthology of ‘easy-to-read’ poetry for second and third graders. I enlisted help from children in a neighborhood school. What should go into ‘our book?’ The children were wonderful: very outspoken, and very sure of their judgment. Invariably the poems they rejected were ‘too sweet,’ as they put it. They preferred poems about the here and now (trucks, planes, city traffic) and about the rugged

and wild—'not covered over with the beautiful,' as one boy put it. 'And what should be the title?' I asked: The Easy-to-Read Poetry Book, which teachers and publishers had suggested? No way! So, with the children's approval, it was called *Piper, Pipe that Song Again* (from William Blake's *Songs of Innocence*).

"Over the intervening years, I have had nineteen poetry anthologies published, all compiled with the help of young readers and with titles they approved, such as *Room for Me and a Mountain Lion*, *On City Streets*, *I Heard a Scream in the Street*, *Cats are Cats*, and *The Night of the Whippoorwill*.

### *Nancy Larrick and Civil Rights*

In 1965, Nancy Larrick published an article in the *Saturday Review* that has been called one of the most important articles on children's literature to appear in the 20th century: "The All-White World of Children's Books." Her eye-opening research revealed that in spite of the plea for representation of diverse races in children's books, they were almost non-existent. Larrick lamented "the almost complete omission of Negroes from books for children," and elaborated on the impact of that fact on white as well as non-white children:

"Across the country, 6,340,000 non-white children are learning to read and to understand the American way of life in books which either omit them entirely or scarcely mention them. There is no need to elaborate upon the damage—much of it irreparable—to the Negro child's personality.

But the impact of all-white books upon 39,600,000 white children is probably even worse. Although his light skin makes him one of the world's minorities, the white child learns from his books that he is the kingfish. There seems little chance of developing the humility so urgently needed for world cooperation, instead of world conflict, as long as our children are brought up on gentle doses of racism through their books."

By calling attention to the absence of ethnically diverse characters in books for young people, Larrick raised consciousness in the publishing field during the Civil Rights Movement and encouraged the inclusion of black and other minority characters in children's books of the future. Her criticism led

to several follow-up studies. Today, the rich and diverse range of picture books, stories, poetry and juvenile fiction reflects the depth of the transformation that she helped set in motion.

### *Nancy Larrick —Accolades and Activities*

At the time of her death in November '04, Nancy Larrick Crosby was living in a retirement community in Winchester, Virginia, her hometown. She is survived by two stepsons and three step-grandchildren.

The *Winchester Star* described her as "studious, erudite and urbane, a consummate lady who 'made a difference' here in the northern Valley." Known for her love of nature and historic buildings as well as libraries, she was responsible for creating the children's reading room at the Handley Regional Library in Winchester, and the Native Plant Trail at the State Arboretum, both of which bear her name. In 1992 she was named a Laureate of Virginia.

Nancy Larrick was a founder and president of the International Reading Association, a literacy group that has 80,000 members in about 100 countries. (The group invites children and teenagers to its annual conferences to give teachers pointers on what they enjoy reading.)

Larrick worked with sponsors such as UNESCO, traveling widely (including Nigeria, Singapore, New Delhi) to promote children's reading and the importance of involving parents. She especially enjoyed opportunities to help educate and advance people living in poverty.

### *Education*

Handley High School, Winchester, VA, 1926; B.A., English, Goucher College, 1930; M.A., English, Columbia University, 1937; Ed.D., Elementary Education, New York University, 1955

### *Professional History*

1930-1942—Classroom teacher, Handley schools. Winchester, VA; 1942-1946—Education Director, War Bond Division, U.S. Treasury Dept.; 1946-1951—Editor of elementary school magazines, Young America, Inc.; 1952-1959—Education Director of Children's Books, Random House, Inc.; 1959-1964—Free-lance writer and editor; 1964-1979—Adjunct professor at Lehigh University. Also taught at New York University and Indiana University. ■

Case 2

**Children's Literature  
Book Design and Illustration**

Case 3

**Children's Literature — The Periodical  
Capturing the Moment**

Case 4

**Children's Literature — The Novel  
Entertainment versus Education**

*References:*

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*Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 1958 ed. s.v. , publishing; periodical; children's books.
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- New York Times* obituary, Nov. 21, 2004.
- Saturday Review of Literature*. September 11, 1965.
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- \* Statement by 1987 Women's National Book Association.
- Statement by 2004 Children's Literature Conference.

Numerous and varied internet searches turned up a remarkable number of sites with information relevant to the history of 18th- and 19th-century children's literature—periodicals and novels alike. While too numerous to list in their entirety, they have been invaluable for this initial look at the children's literature in the special collections of Goucher's Julia Rogers Library. The following sites in particular are acknowledged for the interesting and generous amount of information they provided for this study.

[www.merrycoz.org](http://www.merrycoz.org)

[www.britannica.com/women/articles/Dodge\\_Mary\\_Elizabeth\\_Mapes.html](http://www.britannica.com/women/articles/Dodge_Mary_Elizabeth_Mapes.html)

<http://www.facstaff.bucknell.edu/gcarr/a9cUSWW/MMD/weiss.html>

<http://www.daguerre.org/resource/texts/bogardus/bogard7.html>

<http://www.sc.edu/fitzgerald/scribner.html>

<http://histclo.com/style/suit/faunt/faunt.html>

<http://www.arts.uwaterloo.ca/ENGL/courses/engl208c/1870.htm>

<http://64.23.15.18/faunt.htm>

<http://www.library.ucla.edu/libraries/special/childhood/pictur.htm>

[www.nal.vam.ac.uk/exhibits/miniaturelibraries/index.html](http://www.nal.vam.ac.uk/exhibits/miniaturelibraries/index.html)