

John Caspar Wister Papers
The Wister Family Special Collection of La Salle University
(Jan. 12, 2005)

John Caspar Wister (1887-1982), one of America's most honored horticulturists, spent his youth at the house "Wister" (which stood at Wister and Clarkson Avenues, Germantown, Philadelphia), adjacent to the Belfield estate owned by his grandparents, their descendants, and now by La Salle University. A 1909 graduate of Harvard College, Wister studied at the Harvard School of Landscape Architecture and afterwards worked from 1911 to 1916 in landscape architects' offices in Philadelphia and New York. During World War I, he served in France. After the war, he practiced landscape architecture on his own, first from the house "Wister" and later from his home in Swarthmore, PA. In 1929, he became Director of the Arthur Hoyt Horticultural Foundation, Swarthmore College; in 1946, he also became Director of the John J. Tyler Arboretum (Lima, PA); among many other administrative appointments, he served from 1930-1957 as vice-president and then president of the John Bartram Association. The author or editor of a dozen books on horticulture, he also wrote over five hundred articles and gave innumerable lectures around the country. He was honored by many dozens of horticultural groups, including the New York Botanical Garden, the Horticultural Society of New York, the Royal Horticultural Society of Great Britain, the Pennsylvania Horticultural Society, and the Garden Club of America. At his death in 1982, the Philadelphia *Inquirer* aptly described John Caspar Wister as "the dean of American horticulturists."

Contents of Boxes

John Caspar Wister Papers. Box 1

Folders:

Photograph of Mary Channing Wister (ca. 1890-1895), "taken at 'Milton' [Massachusetts], No Date but probably 1890 to 1895"; Wife of Novelist Owen Wister.

Letters from and to Gertrude Smith Wister (1905-1999), wife of John Caspar Wister

Letters from and to John Caspar Wister, mainly 1902-1922 and to his family. Together with a 1979 account by John Caspar Wister of his various birthdays.

Photographs of John Caspar Wister, of the back of his Harvard Avenue Home in Swarthmore, PA, and of the Swarthmore College Campus

Biographical information about (and photographs of) Gertrude Smith Wister (1905-1999)

Wedding Congratulations to John Caspar Wister and Gertrude Smith Wister, Spring 1960. Original folder marked "A few saved." Includes letters from William Wister Haines, Frances Anne Wister Stokes and Walter Stokes (with original poems).

Obituaries of John Caspar Wister, 1887-1982

Photographs of John Caspar Wister

Biographical Information about John Caspar Wister.

Essay (27 pp.) by John Caspar Wister on "The Educational Value of the Study of Horticulture," Harvard College, December 8, 1908.

List of lectures given by John Caspar Wister from 1919 to 1949.

"Garden Planting," a lecture given by John Caspar Wister and dated December 1924; together with "Iris Notes, 1916."

Letters to John Caspar Wister, 1955-1979.

Letters to John Caspar Wister, 1957.

John Caspar Wister Papers. Box 2

Folders:

Typescripts of Four Lectures Delivered by John Casper Wister at the Philadelphia Unitarian Church in February 1938: (1) February 6, 1938: "How Far Is It Wise to Regulate Conduct by Law"; (2) February 13, 1938: "Is Censorship Ever Justified"; (3) February 20, 1938: "Is it Patriotic to Criticize or Defy the Government"; (4) February 27, 1938: "How Much and How are our Thoughts and Actions Influenced by Propaganda."

Miscellaneous Horticultural Items and Information on Horticultural Awards Presented to John Caspar Wister

Photographs of John Caspar Wister's Horticultural Medals

Letters to John Caspar Wister, Spring, 1958

General Correspondence of John Caspar Wister, 1937-1971.

General Correspondence of John Caspar Wister, 1967.

Letters to John Caspar Wister from Foreign Nurserymen (Dutch, French, and British), 1932-1955.

John Caspar Wister Papers. Box 3

Horticultural Articles, Clippings, and Offprints (also some articles by Gertrude Smith Wister, and by both John Caspar Wister and Gertrude Smith Wister. Publications include *American Horticultural Magazine*, *American Horticulturist*, *Arboretum Bulletin*, *American Rhododendron Society Bulletin*, *Arnoldia*, *Brooklyn Botanic Garden Record*, *Bulletin of John J. Tyler Arboretum*, *Daffodil and Tulip Year Book 1964*, *The Garden Journal*, *The Green Scene*, *Horticulture*, *House and Garden*, *New York Times*, *New York Herald Tribune*, *PHS News*. Also present in this box are about fifteen original sketches of plants, trees, flowers.

John Caspar Wister Papers. Box 4

Folders:

John Caspar Wister articles and MSS: (1) "Plant Names: A Botanical Nightmare, 1951; (2) Some Notes on the Introduction of Garden Plants; (3) "The John J. Tyler Arboretum (Painter Arboretum), 1947; (4) "All About Your Garden Specialty," 1950; "Notes on Trip [to New York and New England]," September 20-26, 1951; "The Rhododendron Planting in the Woods Around the Outdoor Arboretum," 1951. Together with Thelma K. Stevens, "Planting for a Campus," *New York Times*, May 18, 1952 (about John Caspar Wister and the arboretum at Swarthmore College).

Legal papers: original folder was marked "Gift of Wister Land to Philadelphia, Gift of Land on Squam Lake to N[ew] E[ngland] Forestry Foundation." Also present is John Caspar Wister's Last Will and Testament.

Letters and cards (1982 and 1983) to Gertrude Wister on death of her husband John Caspar Wister.

Miscellaneous photos and exercises from John Casper Wister's time at Harvard College.

Clippings about John Casper Wister from Chester, PA, *Times*, July 16, 1951; Des Moines *Register*, July 28, 1948; Montclair *Times*, October 6, 1966.

John Caspar Wister Papers. Box 5

Miscellaneous box of World War I materials kept by John Caspar Wister and by his family, including sheet music, newspaper clippings, military paperwork, war-time letters to and from John Caspar Wister.

John Caspar Wister Papers. Box 6

Folders:

Original Typescript of Unpublished Novel by John Caspar Wister under pseudonym "Laurence Alexander": *The Night the Lights Went Out*. Date of Typescript is January 1938. Genre is Science Fiction. 249 pages.

Typescript Copy of John Caspar Wister's World War I diaries from July 9, 1917-March 1, 1918. The original diaries are in the John Caspar Wister Papers, Box 8..

John Caspar Wister's World War I Photograph Album

John Caspar Wister Papers. Box 7

Reminiscences of John Caspar Wister (1887-1982), a typewritten autobiographical manuscript in nine chapters, unpublished, in which Wister covers his life up to the date given in the typescript's preface: "Spring or Summer, 1967, or 1968."

John Caspar Wister Papers. Box 8

John Caspar Wister, Four Diaries (Including World War I diaries) and Six Day Books

Diaries: #1 (July 9, 1917-March 1, 1918: transcription is in Box 6); #2 (not present and location unknown); #3 (July 1, 1918-January 14, 1919); #4 (January 15, 1919-May 16, 1919); #5 (May 16, 1919-July 1, 1919).

Day Books: #1 (January 1, 1906-December 31, 1906); #2 (January 1, 1905-December 31, 1905); #3 (January 1, 1907-December 31, 1907); #4 (January 1, 1909-December 31, 1909); #5 (January 1, 1910-December 31, 1910); #6 (April 22, 1922 -May 12, 1922).

John Caspar Wister Papers. Planting Plans Prepared for Clients

Garden and Landscape Plans, Box 9-A:

- “735 Harvard Avenue, Swarthmore PA, June 1939.”
- “Part Plan of Grounds of Mrs. John M Frame, August 16, 1937.”
- “Planting Plan, Cottage at Sky Farm, John C. Wister, November 1937.”
- “Planting Plan For Property of Dr. and Mrs. Frank Aydelotte, Waterford, Connecticut, October 15, 1946.”
- “Planting Plan For Property of Dr. and Mrs. Frank Aydelotte, Waterford, Connecticut, Jan. 23, 1947.”
- “Planting Plan for Entrance Drive, Fort Hunter, Susquehanna [Harrisburg] PA, March 1950.”
- “Plot Plan, Thomas B. Grabb, Moorestown, NJ, Feb 2, 1929.”
- “Scott Horticultural Foundation, Swarthmore College, Harvard Avenue Area, Enlargement--Section E6, F, G, H, J, K, L, N, November 15, 1964.”
- “Survey, Jan, 26, 1949, Area Around Thomas House [Swarthmore College, Swarthmore, PA].”
- “Topography Plan of Property of Thomas B. McCabe, Swarthmore, PA, [1941].”
- “Working Sketch for Planting, Samuel Memorial, Fairmount Park, Philadelphia, July 15, 1938.”

Garden and Landscape Plans, Box 9-B:

- “Garden Planting Plans for Mrs. John S. Taber, Forest Ave., Rye, NY.”
- “Plan of Pool, Showers, Wash Stand: Sky Farm, N.J., Sept. 1938.”
- “Planting Plan for Area Around House, Property of Mr. and Mrs. A. James D’Angelo, Darling, Pennsylvania, March 1952.”
- “Planting Plan for Boyd Spahr, Bluebell, PA, May 1, 1939.”
- “Planting Plan for Grounds of Director’s House, Institute for Advanced Study, Princeton, NJ, Aug. 15, 1940.”
- “Planting Plan for Miss Goldman, 2 Newlin Road, Princeton, New Jersey, 1940.
- “Planting Plan for Mr. and Mrs. Stanley Bright, Cedar Hill Farm, Reading, PA, Aug. 15, 1926.”
- “Preliminary Sketch for Planting Plan, Property of Prof. E. M. Earle, Institute for Advanced Study, Princeton New Jersey, October 15, 1940.”
- “Rough Planting Sketch for Prof. E. A. Lowe, Institute for Advanced Study, Princeton, New Jersey, October 30, 1940.”
- “Trees and Shrub Planting Plan for Garden for John B. Wallace Jr., 436 Prospect Avenue, New Haven, Conn, September 24, 1928.”
- “Vine Planting, Field Hall, Institute for Advanced Study, Princeton, 1944.”

Garden and Landscape Plans, Box 9-C:

- “Institute for Advanced Study, 1940-1944, Surveys, Maps, Architects Plans.”
- “Institute for Advanced Study, 1947.”

- “Plan of Property of Stanley Bright, Bern Townships, PA, April, 1922.”
- “Planting Plan for Mr. and Mrs. Morris L. Cook, Chestnut Hill, Philadelphia, PA.”
- “Planting Plan of Proposed Herb Garden for Garden Center, Toledo Zoological Park, Toledo, Ohio, March 31, 1954.” [Also plans for Rose Garden and for Entrance and Parking.]
- “Planting Plan, Mr. Charles Stehle, Crestmont Farms, Torresdale, PA, March 20, 1939.”
- “Planting Sketch of Miss Elizabeth Bass, Showing Property on Prospect Street, Wilton, Maine, September 1, 1931.”
- “Sketch for Garden and Shrub Borders, Mr. and Mrs. F. C. Macomber, Mt. Kisco, NY, Feb. 15, 1926.”
- “Sketch for Planting Plan for Outdoor Theater for Mr. and Mrs. Owen Moon, Woodstock, Vermont, Sept. 1926.”
- “Sketch Plan for Garden for Mrs. Edgar Scott, Bryn Mawr, Pennsylvania, March 1931 [Dec 1930-April 1931].”

Garden and Landscape Plans, Box 9-D:

- “Basic Outline, Garden Center, Toledo Zoological Park, Toledo, Ohio, February 16, 1954.” [Several Sketches.]
- “Ewing Park, Des Moines, Iowa, Final Planting of Lilacs, July 15, 1949.”
- “Map of Sentinel Pines, Robert E. Henry, Owner, Hague, Warren Co., NY. Survey 1929 by W. G. Wells.” [Very fragile.]
- “Planting Sketch, Front of House of Mr. and Mrs. William S. Ladd, Mendham, NJ, October 24, 1949.”
- “Topographical Map Made for Sydney P. Clark, Whitpain Twp., Montgomery County, Pennsylvania, August 26, 1930.” [Also “Plan of New Orchard, Sydney P. Clark, Norristown Rd., near Broad Ax, PA, April 6, 1931.”]
- “Topographical Survey of Part of the Zoological Park for the Toledo Zoological Society, Toledo, Ohio, February 12, 1954.”

Garden and Landscape Plans, Box 9-E:

- [Large Watercolor Sketch of “Theseum,” Harvard, 1910, by John C. Wister.]
- “Cottage at Sky Farm, November 1937.” [Sketch of property; there are no plantings shown.]
- “Plan [and Planting Diagram] of ‘Wister,’ Germantown, PA, July 1910 [bounded by Clarkson, Wister, and Belfield].”
- “Planting Plan for the property of Frank H. Fleeer Corporation, 10th St. and Somerville Ave., Philadelphia, PA. John C. Wister, Architect; Harry Wood, Consultant, February 16, 1948.” [Four large landscape plans, rolled together.]
- “Planting Plan for Thomas A Ford, February 1953.” [Several sketches and plans.]
- “Planting Plan for Thomas C. McCabe, 607 N. Chester Road, Swarthmore, Pennsylvania, June 26, 1941.”
- “Proposed and Existing Planting for John Bartram Gardens, 54th and Elwood Ave, Philadelphia, 43, PA, June 1960.”

“The Sarah P. Duke Memorial Garden at Duke University, Durham, North Carolina, December, 1935.”

Garden and Landscape Plans, Box 9-F:

- “Parking Area Sky Farm [New Jersey],” several plans from various dates in August and September 1940.
- “Holly Trail, Ida Cason Gardens, U.S. Highway 27—2 miles south of Chipley, Georgia, July 15, 1952.” Several plans, including one sketch of “Meadowlark Picnic Area, Ida Cason Gardens.”
- “Planting Plan for Property of Mrs. Samuel Chew, Germantown Ave. and Cliveden Street, Germantown, PA. Nov. 1920.” This house is now called “Cliveden.”
- “Plan of Property of Dr. and Mrs. Frank Aydelotte, 88 Battle Road, Princeton, New Jersey, September 1949.” Two plans.
- “Preliminary Plan for Iris Garden, Estate of F. Simmons, Esq., Greenwich, Connecticut. Isabella Pendleton, Landscape Architect, July 22, 1929.” Blueprint.
- “Scott Horticultural Foundation, Swarthmore College, Harvard Avenue Area, Section C3, Deciduous Shrubs. Working Copy, corrected January 1968.”
- Design and Planting Plan for Memorial Planting of Native Trees and Shrubs, Ewing Park, Des Moines, Iowa, September 15, 1958.” Several plans.
- “Herschel Smith Rhododendron Planting, Section J, August 27, 1968.”
- “Herschel Smith Rhododendron Planting, Section 00, August 1968.”
- “Herschel Smith Rhododendron Planting, Section N, August 1, 1968.”
- “Herschel Smith Rhododendron Planting, Section K, July, 1965.”
- “Herschel Smith Rhododendron Planting, Section F, August 27, 1968.”
- “Herschel Smith Rhododendron Planting, Section E, August 22, 1968.”
- “Herschel Smith Rhododendron Planting, Section P, August, 1968.”
- “Herschel Smith Rhododendron Planting, Section G, July 18, 1968.”

Garden and Landscape Plans, Box 9-G:

- “Property of Mr. Abram Nesbit 3rd, Maple Street, Kinston, Pennsylvania,” several plans from 1931.
- Printed Maps of Southeastern Pennsylvania,
- “Ewing Park, Des Moines, General Plan of Lilac Section, August 15, 1958.”
- “Sketch for Property of Mr. C. S. Ristine, Stafford, PA, showing Sites for Orchard, Vegetable & Cutting Gardens, Rose Garden, Rock Garden, Iris Walk, Lilac Walk, etc., etc., July 26, 1930.” Also second plan dated April 1931.
- “Sketch of Terrace of Mrs Wm Frederick, 1953.” Total of about eight sketches, now rolled together.

Garden and Landscape Plans, Box 9-H

- “Topographical Survey of Property of William Logan Fox, situate in White Marsh Twp., Montgomery Co., Penna.... C, Raymond Weir Registered Surveyor, November 6, 1927; with small preliminary sketch of planting plan.

“Planting Plan--Wister’s Wood’s Park, 22nd & 42nd Wards, Philadelphia, PA, Sept. 20, 1921,” rolled with “Map of Present and Proposed Paths--Wister’s Woods Park, September 8, 1921.”

Planting plans (several) for Squam Lake, New Hampshire, including planting plans for Victoria Lodge, Thompson’s Corner, Meredith, N. H., 11-15-22.” These plans are very fragile and difficult to unroll.

“Basic Outline, Garden Center, Toledo Zoological Park, Toledo, Ohio, February 16, 1954.” Several plans.

Note: Planting Plan for “Stenton,” once included with La Salle’s collection of John Caspar Wister’s planting plans, was transferred in 2003 to Stenton Mansion, Philadelphia; the planting plan was too fragile to unwrap when donated to La Salle University, but Stenton Mansion plans to raise funds to conserve this item.