

*U of A's new equine &
agricultural studies collection*

A SIGNIFICANT PRIVATE collection of 19th- and 20th-century equestrian books was donated to the University of Alberta this past summer, just as it was launching a new veterinary research program. The books came from an Ontario collector, John Mitchell, a retired professional agrologist. Mitchell was 12 at the Second World War's end when his father, a physician, returned to Canada to re-establish his practice and home. "Luckily for me, a pony was in the plans." After university, Mitchell moved to southern Ontario and started a farm and general mixed livestock enterprise, including horses. "My father and mother started me in horse books. As my time with horses waned I became more interested in collecting horse books. Our foundation hunter mares and Oldenburg stallion were sold in 1969 and the last of their progeny in 1986. The bookshelves became a stable, a very satisfactory substitute."

The donation of his books to a western institution was first suggested by my father, William (Bill), who had lived in Edmonton as a teenager, and attended the University of Alberta as an ROTC with the local regiment, Lord Strathcona's Horse. After a career in the military, he spent much of the last three decades of his life involved with various volunteer organizations, and it was on the board of the Salvation Army that he met and became friends with John Mitchell.

Last fall John and his wife Jean decided to sell their house, which meant culling and a chance comment to my father about finding his collection of about 200 books a new home. My father suggested that being a cavalry regiment, perhaps the Strathcona Museum (part of the Museum of the Regiments in Calgary) would be interested. I was being updated on this by Dad in our regular chats and e-mails until he died quite suddenly in February. One of the last things he'd been working on was a list of John's collection. John and I connected at the funeral, and I was pleased to help see the project through.

My father had contacted the regiment but received no firm reply about how the books might be welcomed. I suspected that an inquiry about a donation received from a retired general officer and former colonel of the regiment might be difficult for anyone in the regiment to tactfully deflect, even if they were boxes of old Harlequins

(which these are not). Things dragged on for a few months until one day the regimental curator politely explained that because the books weren't about the regiment specifically, accommodating them would not be easy. Being a Strathcona, he suggested a possible alternative. It was a good suggestion, but while investigating it an even better one presented itself: hearing of my efforts to find the books an appropriate home, my friend Jeannine Green, Special Collections Librarian at the University of Alberta, wrote to me about the new veterinary program and suggesting the university would be pleased to have the books. She put me on to Dr. Merrill Distad, and within just a few e-mail exchanges the collection had an enthusiastic new home.

While the primary focus of the collection — now known as the Jean Haste Mitchell and John Nelson Mitchell Equine and Agricultural Studies Collection — is equine, there are also a number of more general agricultural works, farming manuals, and examples of 19th-century agricultural journals.

"Traditionally, the university's library did not collect veterinary books for veterinarians, but did and does collect things to support the animal husbandry program," Dr. Distad says. "Many of the titles contained in the Mitchell collection are fairly scarce and, since many are on topics that are dear to some specialized collectors, may also be deemed 'rare' in light of the prices scarce copies in good condition command."

Distad says that the collection, "the vast majority of which titles are unique additions to our collections, will provide a rich background of sources on the subject, which should be of interest to historians and those other scholars who are engaged in so-called cultural studies, if not also to students and scholars engaged in veterinary medicine as such."

Mitchell shares this hope that the books will assist scholars investigating a wide range of topics, and that the collection will attract donations from other collectors in the field. "I enjoy reading, thinking and imagining how much we owe to horses and horse people who carried us to the point of steam and the internal combustion engine. I hope these books will be a constant reminder of that. Horse books by horse people are a link to our past and helped explain Canada to me. Without the horse and horse people our country could not have developed such an energy efficient and sustainable system. Mares and stallions were responsible for the manufacture of extremely efficient machines dependent only on solar-

generated renewable fuel. It is interesting to think what kind of horse propelled society we would have evolved had the car and steam arrived 100 years later."

I read through some of my father's e-mails mentioning John and his collection, and in one he wrote "I think that in Western Canada the books would find a good home." And so they have.

ROLLIN MILROY

WINDFLOWER



"Ana has no choice but to flee by moonlight on the even of her wedding. She beads to the exotic port of Serona, in search of the elusive Felix Bulerias, a man reputed to have the answers she seeks—as well as in search of herself."

An excerpt from NICK BANTOCK's new novel:

Zephyr asked me what I wanted to try first. I was nervous about the fast, swirling machines, their wound-up music and flashing lights, so I opted for the white tents that housed more gentle pursuits like archery, hoops, and coconut shies. It was this last stall that most fascinated me. I'd never even touched a coconut and I wanted one very badly. I flung each of my wooden balls with as much might as I could muster and twice I hit coconuts full on, only to see the ball ricochet off. I turned to Zephyr and threw my arms up in despair. "I think they're glued to their stands," I horse-whispered.

"That's more than possible." Zephyr removed his coat with a glint in his eye. Paying the young red-faced attendant for a new pail of balls, Zephyr weighed one of the spheres carefully. Then he let fly. I could not believe the velocity his slim frame was able to generate. For a fraction of a second the ball seemed too high, but it swung and dipped at the last moment and hit its target so violently that the coconut completely shattered. Zephyr turned toward the now even redder-faced attendant and

shot him a withering stare. The youth, who clearly wanted no argument with anyone who could throw a ball that hard, immediately held out a fresh, glue-free coconut. "I think," said Zephyr, "it belongs to the lady."

I confess I liked being called a lady. I clutched tight my coconut and declared that I was ready for something more arduous.

For the next two hours we rode in little cars that bumped into one another; I had my stomach turned inside out on a giant clockwork whale; we saw ourselves squashed and elongated in curved mirrors; we watched bearded ladies, five-legged sheep, and muscle-bound strong men. I lost myself in another world.

Finally Zephyr asked me how brave I was feeling. "Oh, brave as brave can be!" I said, heady with all the fun and gaiety.

"Then let's try the Catapult."

Windflower, by Nick Bantock with Eduardo Ponti, is published this fall by Chronicle Books. A new play based on Bantock's Griffin & Sabine series premieres in Vancouver in October.

TRENDS IN COLLECTING

Man Booker II: The Wrath of Rushdie

IN THE LAST column, I mentioned that J.M. Coetzee won the Man Booker Prize in 1983 for his *Life and Times of Michael K*. Aside from the disagreement as to which edition is the true first (the U.K. or the South African), there is also a story over how this title was chosen. The vote that year between the four judges was split between Salman Rushdie's *Shame* and *Life & Times of Michael K*. The tie-breaking vote had to be made by the Chair of Judges for that year, Fay Weldon, who initially selected Rushdie. As the prize organizer, Martyn Goff, was phoning in the final vote, Weldon changed her mind to Coetzee. Goff came back to the committee to confirm that it was Coetzee, and as he was calling in for the second time, he could hear in the background that Weldon was once again going to change her mind. However, Goff did not hesitate this time and proceeded to announce that Coetzee was the winner in spite of Weldon's indecision.

Rushdie was not pleased (of course) when Coetzee was announced the winner, and was quoted as saying that the selection of Coetzee's novel was "a shitty choice." One has to wonder