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# A Kentucky Collector: An Interview with W. Hugh Peal

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## A Kentucky Collector: An Interview with W. Hugh Peal

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*David Farrell*

The following is edited from an unrehearsed interview with W. Hugh Peal for the University of Kentucky Alumni/Faculty Oral History Project. The interview was conducted by David Farrell at Woodburn, the Peal residence, near Leesburg, Virginia, 4 and 5 October 1977.

Mr. FARRELL: I'd like to talk first about some of your earlier years out in Ballard County and then some of your times at the University of Kentucky. Could you just make a few remarks about your background? Who your parents were?

Mr. PEAL: I was born in Bandana, Kentucky, on March the 27th, 1898, the son of Jasper Stephen Peal and Mary Ann Wingo Peal. My father's great-grandfather had been brought to Kentucky in the early 1800s by the first Stephen Peal. My mother's family were originally Scots who came to Virginia in the middle of the eighteenth century and came to Kentucky in the 1820s and acquired a large tract of land in Western Kentucky and Western Tennessee which became available as a result of the Jackson treaty with the Choctaws. The Civil War destroyed the prosperity of the Peal and Wingo families, but they managed to retain their land and managed to keep a standard of living which, as poor as it might seem to us, was at least as good as anyone else in the area. The prevailing passion in both families was not, I think, so much to get money or acquire land as to have some cultural position in the world. To some extent this may have been a matter of keeping up with the Joneses, but both families were great lovers of books.

I was the fourth child of the marriage, two of my brothers having died in infancy, so that between my elder brother and me was a space of eight years. This, I think, was an important matter because it threw me more in a society of older people than would have been the case had my two older brothers not died. I was a very strong and healthy young child but had spinal meningitis at an early age, and, in my teens, I had a spell of tuberculosis which



resulted in the loss of one year of schooling. I think that these two happenings exerted a decisive influence on my whole life, because it, to a very considerable extent, diverted my attention from sports, race horses, and the like, all of which were commoner with my contemporaries, and drove me into what, I suppose, we might call the library.

Mr. FARRELL: Did you go to Paducah frequently?

Mr. PEAL: No, no. We would occasionally go to Paducah to shop. We would occasionally go to Paducah to the minstrels—Lassus White's minstrels. He was a famous minstrel, well-known through the whole South. They came to Paducah every year, and they were honored guests.

Mr. FARRELL: Paducah was the social, the cultural center for you. In that, I mean it wouldn't have been Memphis or Nashville or Louisville?

Mr. PEAL: To the extent that there was any cultural center, apart from Paducah itself, it would have been St. Louis. And everybody got to Memphis a few times in his lifetime. Now both Memphis and St. Louis, I think, are considerably closer to Paducah than Louisville. I think, also, it's pretty important to remember that although Western Kentucky has been a bit of a poor relation in the romantic interests of the state, it's a good deal older than Central Kentucky. It was where Marquette and Joliet came through, and the Indian Wars. George Rogers Clark rendezvoused there on his trip to Vincennes, and got a large tract of land which included land later owned by my family. Old Fort Columbus, and, across the river, old Fort Massac, where Aaron Burr had his meetings—and those are all a part of what you might call the interior river life of the United States and sort of an entirely different social background than Central Kentucky. And much more of a continental thinking place. So that it would not occur to us that it was strange if we went to Memphis or New Orleans or St. Louis or even Chicago, as we thought we were a little more part of the mainstream than Central Kentucky would have been.

Mr. FARRELL: What were your ambitions upon going to U.K.? What did you want to do?

Mr. PEAL: I knew one professor at U.K. I don't suppose I'd seen him more than two or three times, but he was a great favorite and remained a great friend and great favorite throughout my entire period there, and that was Dr. John Thomas Cotton Noe.

Mr. FARRELL: The poet?



Mr. PEAL: The poet. That's right. Dr. Noe used to come to Western Kentucky to speak at cultural and educational associations and read his poems. And he became, even before I got there, a very good friend, and after I got there he became really one of the kindest and nicest people that I have ever known in my life. I can't tell you his background. He went to Cornell, I'm pretty certain, because the poem he liked best and would recite at a moment's notice was a poem about Cornell—the redbuds blooming in the hills behind the cliffs of Ithaca. That was my first introduction to Cornell, but I've been a member of the Cornell Club in New York for twenty years or more, so that I've had a good deal of experience with Cornell since.

Mr. FARRELL: Well, you had decided pretty early on that something in law might appeal to you?

Mr. PEAL: Yes, I did, because my father was sort of a frustrated lawyer, and he would have been a wonderful lawyer—much better than I've ever been—to the point of balanced judgment and so on. Wouldn't have had the enthusiasm, I suppose, I had.

Mr. FARRELL: What was your first impression of U.K. and Lexington?

Mr. PEAL: I was so pleased to be there. I was so anxious to get into the life of the thing that I took to it like a young duck.

Mr. FARRELL: How about influential professors that you met at the university?

Mr. PEAL: Well, I became very devoted to some of the professors. First place, I liked Dr. McVey very much. Well, when I got there I was elected an officer of some kind. I think it was treasurer of the Service Men's Club. And the legislature had passed a law, which legislatures like to do, that we veterans should have free board, or free rooms, anyway, at the dormitories. Well, there weren't any dormitories. So I got called on to go in to see Dr. McVey, and laid down the law that we had to have these dormitories. Well, Dr. McVey was a very impressive fellow. He had the happy faculty of being able to retain his dignity and use as tough and colloquial language as most anybody but never lose his cool. Well, he listened to my story and the law and so forth. And I had an opinion there from the attorney general, written to me. The state, the attorney general of the state. He listened and said, "Well, Mr. Peal," he said, "your case is quite clear, but," he said, "where in the hell am I going to get the dormitory and the money?" I had the question which the legislature had refused to face up to, but I



laughed at that, because he was talking to a man that really knew about the lack of money. Well, from one thing to another I got to know the doctor quite well. And I think he had a great deal of influence on me.

Mr. FARRELL: And his wife, too, did you know her?

Mr. PEAL: If you mean the second Mrs. McVey, she was a pet. She really was one of the nicest people. She had something which brought her right in my whole ken of enjoyment. We both loved books, and we really loved them. We could sit around, and I remember chortling for an hour with her—I think she had suggested that I read Max Beerbohm's *Zuleika Dobson*. I think probably because I was going to Oxford, or maybe she hoped I was. We had so much fun out of it.

Mr. FARRELL: Did she teach you?

Mr. PEAL: Yes, and at some point she became Dean of Women, I think. But to us she was always Miss Jewell, the English teacher. She was like Dean W.T. Lafferty of the Law School, the really cream of the crop of the great Kentucky types.

Dr. Edward Wiest was also a man of great consequence to me. I don't think he cut as big a figure on campus perhaps as his innate abilities warranted. He was a dean, if I remember correctly. But Wiest must have lived on until about ten, twelve years ago, because I saw him a great many times when I'd go back. One of my great favorites, as I think I mentioned to you at lunch, was Dr. Arthur McQuiston Miller—"Monkey" Miller.

Mr. FARRELL: Tell me some more about him.

Mr. PEAL: Well, I'm sorry I can't give you much about his background, because he was a slightly self-effacing man, and I don't think he was much interested in popularity or anything like that. But he was a man of the most intense devotion to what he regarded as the cause of truth. When I arrived back at the university and reported that I'd had this long discussion with William Jennings Bryan, which I got pushed into with reluctance on my part—I didn't want to get into the discussion. I knew the old man. I'd met him before, and my father was a bit of a Democratic politician. I remember Monkey pulled out an article he had written for *Science*, and Bryan had made the crack somewhere that got into the papers that Mr. Miller might be descended from monkeys, but *he* wasn't. Miller said, "Well," he said, "maybe I come from simian ancestors, but in between those simian ancestors and me there is a long line of Scotch covenanters who stood for



the right as they saw it, and I'm still standing for the right as I see it." He indicated that Mr. Bryan didn't stand for the right as he saw it. You instinctively had a feeling that here's a man, a great man. And, of course, we all knew that he worked like a slave and made a lot of money as an oil geologist and spent it all on the university!

Perhaps one of the professors that I owed as much or more to than anybody else was T. T. Jones—he succeeded Granville "Soc" Terrell as professor of Greek. We both loved to sit down and chew over the meaning of a strange word. Perhaps we could go look it up in fifteen or twenty minutes, but we preferred to interpret it ourselves. If he gave you an examination, he'd give you the papers and go home and say, "Leave it on my desk!" Well, T. T. lived over the other side of Main Street, and after we got through the Greek papers, very often he'd let me, if it was the most elementary things, he'd let me do the grading. And even pay me twenty-five cents a paper!

Mr. FARRELL: To grade your own paper?

Mr. PEAL: No, no. Not my paper! The other papers. It was very trivial, you know, student stuff. Well, at any rate, we'd walk over to his house—this is not the house he was in later in life, but back in the twenties, and he had a swing on the front porch, and he and I'd establish ourselves on that swing, and we'd just discuss the Greek world. And we'd pull out a volume of the classical scholar Sir John Mahaffy and read a page or two. "Now I wonder where they really got that?" "Was that an Asiatic word?" or so on. And it was one of the great experiences of my life. And we'd sit there until Mrs. Jones would come out and ball the hell out of him and shoo me home—all in a most friendly way. Maybe she'd brought cookies or something a little before, but she'd come out and say, "You've got the wood to bring in!" And, "Hugh, you go home!" Well, those were tremendous factors.

Mr. FARRELL: You seem to have had lucky associations with teachers. They seem to have accepted you as a younger equal, as almost a colleague.

Mr. PEAL: Well, I think they would anybody that had the enthusiasm and interest that I had. I don't think I was unique. I mean, T. T. Jones—there weren't many people that would listen to T. T. Jones talk Greek for the whole afternoon! And I was willing to do it. But if another one had come along, I don't know that there's any reason to believe that T. T. wouldn't have been as



cordial with him. And Miss Jewell, the later Mrs. McVey, she had no lack of adherents and devoted friends.

Mr. FARRELL: People who would spend time with her after class and talk about literature.

Mr. PEAL: Well, Dr. Melcher—Dr. Columbus Rudolph Melcher, who taught German. He was really a great man and a devoted teacher. He taught me a great many little songs and a great many little German expressions which have proven to be very useful to me, both when I was in Germany as a young man and when I have traveled. Professor Lampert—Lampert was the kind that would have been very much at home in an English drawing room. He was witty, he was talented. Red Farquhar, Professor Farquhar, the English teacher. Now, there was a man you could never go through! I had a great admiration for him and a great gratitude for what he did. Thomas Poe Cooper—never had a class under him or anything else, but he used to have little entertainments and was very kind to students. And I had some close friends among the Ag people, and I got to know him and his wife quite well. Twenty-five years after I had left I went back with Dr. Ed Johnson, the plant pathologist at U.K., and decided I'd call on all the ones that I'd known, and I had a long conversation with Cooper. He went into great lengths of the reasons why he stayed at the university.

Mr. FARRELL: What did he say?

Mr. PEAL: Well, that I'm not going to tell you, because they involved other people and things like that.

Mr. FARRELL: Not even a synopsis?

Mr. PEAL: No, no. Not even a synopsis! Now, another of my teachers, Miss Barrett, was absolutely devoted to French language and literature, and it rubbed off. She never gave me good grades, because I was never technically good at it. I got so interested in rushing off with the text that I didn't worry too much about the grammar, and I still don't. I can write a passable letter in French, if I have to. I have a great feeling of gratitude toward her.

Mr. FARRELL: I wanted to ask you—you worked in the library as a night clerk on the circulation desk. Are there any stories to that, that you could tell that would be of interest to people in the library? And particularly your, perhaps, your impressions of the university's first librarian, Margaret King?

Mr. PEAL: Well, I have some stories I could tell you, but I won't.

Mr. FARRELL: Oh, tell me one.



Mr. PEAL: Evening in the library was apt to be. . . . Well, the library was a good place with no admission fees charged, and since money was sort of scarce, it was a good place for Johnny to meet Mary. And, on one occasion, I almost lost my job by protecting the Johnny and Mary. On this occasion they had gotten down in the basement in the shelves, but Miss King thought that I was being pretty lax about this. Of course, I was deliberately looking the other way, I guess.

Mr. FARRELL: And can you say something now about the competition for your Rhodes Scholarship?

Mr. PEAL: Scholarship had become the major test—and not only scholarship, but scholarship of the type that might be expected to be successful in a school at Oxford. I mean law school or something. I applied, and I think there were thirteen applicants, and I think I won out on a sort of a negative exclusion basis. One lad, for instance, that had an almost complete record of success, wanted to study modern history and was unable to read French and German at sight. Well, I could read French and German at sight. Another one, who wanted to study law, wanted to go over and take a Bachelor in Civil Law but couldn't read Latin at sight, and I could read Latin at sight. So again, the linguistic things, I think, were the determining factor.

Mr. FARRELL: This pool of thirteen—was it from the Southeast, was it from Kentucky?

Mr. PEAL: They were all Kentuckians. In those days they were selected by states. They weren't all at the University of Kentucky. I mean they were—one from Harvard and, I think, one from Yale and two from Princeton and so on.

Mr. FARRELL: So, some were eliminated. You had the linguistic ability. This put you ahead.

Mr. PEAL: That's right, and my grades were about the same as theirs. But I know one of them, for instance, wanted to take science, but he was short in his mathematics, and it was always a question of the happy mediocrity. I think that's really what did it. I know McVey was a very shrewd and careful fellow, and he was on the committee, and he obviously wanted me.

Mr. FARRELL: And he wanted someone who would be a success there.

Mr. PEAL: Well, yes, but I've always thought he had a kind of feeling. I talked to, after being elected, various people and was told that I ought to go to Exeter, because Exeter had a great law



group. Are you familiar with the organization of Oxford? It's really an association of separate colleges.

Mr. FARRELL: Yes, yes.

Mr. PEAL: Even when I was there I never could straighten out all of the angles. The same man would appear one day as a university professor and the next day as a college tutor.

Mr. FARRELL: Well, it must have been quite an excitement, though, for you to be going off to England?

Mr. PEAL: It was a tremendous excitement.

Mr. FARRELL: Well, what was your leave-taking like? Can you reconstruct that?

Mr. PEAL: Well, my leave-taking from the university? I don't know. In those days we still followed some old-fashioned manners, and I went around and told everybody goodbye.

Mr. FARRELL: Miss Jewell must have been excited.

Mr. PEAL: Everybody! Yes, everybody. And, when I went home, I must have visited 500 family friends, and that would have been regarded as—anybody that had been left out of one of those visits, it would have been regarded as an affront. I don't suppose people do that anymore at all, but it never occurred to me that I shouldn't go to each village, even the farm places, and as an old friend of my family I should go in and tell them goodbye.

Mr. FARRELL: And how did you regard it yourself? Did you go off to England with high spirits?

Mr. PEAL: Oh, I was sitting on top of the world! This was just what I wanted to do. This was the achievement beyond anything I could ever imagine. I really took the whole thing in sort of a gamble, the way you might buy a lottery ticket.

Mr. FARRELL: And you came out on top?

Mr. PEAL: And I came out on top. Well, some lottery ticket buyers come out on top!

Mr. FARRELL: I'd like to talk a little about the development of your library, of your book collecting interests. Can you tell me where you began?

Mr. PEAL: Well, as I mentioned, I grew up in a family, not only my immediate family, but swarms of relatives, a great many of whom were really bookish. And so I grew up with books, and this is the sort of thing that grows as you get older. Other friends of the family, or friends perhaps I had made myself, made me welcome to their library. And I gradually began to acquire a few books of my own.



Mr. FARRELL: Current books you are talking about?

Mr. PEAL: No, they were not, mostly. The Masterson Ogden library had descended in due course of time to Brown Ogden. And I not only had free access to that library, but he gave me a great many items. And very important and unusual items.

Mr. FARRELL: What sorts of things did he give you?

Mr. PEAL: Well, he gave me a set of Gibbon, for instance. Gibbon's *Decline and Fall*.

Mr. FARRELL: An early edition?

Mr. PEAL: Yes, it was not by any means a first edition. I've later acquired a first, but this was a scholar's edition. And I gave it away maybe fifty years ago. I passed it on to other people the same as it was passed on to me. But it was a good readable edition, and I had read Gibbon in full before I went to high school. He gave me Pope, Pope's works, and not only that, but this old gentleman, who had been born around 1839 or 1840, would sit around for hours and hours with me and read these books and discuss them. And so I had a—like Charles Lamb—I had a fine closet of good English and American literature.

Another uncle—these were not blood uncles, these were uncles in the Kentucky sense—had been with Joseph E. Johnston's army when it evacuated Atlanta. Well, he was passing a printing office, and the contents had been thrown out into the street. He retrieved one volume of a Dublin edition of Blackstone's *Commentaries*, and he gave that to me.

Mr. FARRELL: A budding lawyer. And you still have that?

Mr. PEAL: Yes, I still have that. I remember at one time going along in one of the many bookstores in Oxford—many more than there are now—and I bought a little calf-bound, somewhat battered book, somewhere around 1800, published under the name of Thomas Little. But some previous owner had in pencil inscribed on the title-page, "Thomas Moore." And I checked it, and for sixpence I acquired a first edition of Thomas Moore—who did write under the name of Little for awhile.

Mr. FARRELL: I see! So that was a fortuitous discovery. What bookstores do you recall at Oxford? Blackwell's?

Mr. PEAL: Well, Blackwell's and Parker's both, and I must be among the oldest names on their books.

Mr. FARRELL: And did you meet some book collectors in Oxford when you were there?

Mr. PEAL: Well, I don't think, in the general term of book



collectors, I knew any. Nearly every Oxford don has a few books and is proud of them, but I don't remember offhand having met anyone—except maybe Charles Pipkin, who was a Rhodes Scholar in my class from Louisiana—who really got interested in antiquarian books. When I got back to America and got established in New York—the pickings are pretty small for a young lawyer, so I really bought few books to read and would hang around Fourth Avenue and other places where they had books for sale. And, one time, I got a catalogue from Blackwell's, with whom I had kept up an account, and they had a first edition of one of Charles Lamb's earlier books. And it had an insertion letter in it, and it was offered for the pound equivalent of about \$50. I immediately fired back a letter, and, to my amazement, I got it.

Mr. FARRELL: Was that your first important acquisition?

Mr. PEAL: It was my first important Lamb acquisition.

Mr. FARRELL: Well, did you at this point conceive of the Lamb collection? You have a remarkable collection now, don't you?

Mr. PEAL: I think it grew gradually. I got item by item a few things—and some very interesting and important things—until 1954, when Mrs. William Warren Carman's library came on the market. Mrs. Carman was the secretary of Ernest Dressel North who, in his own opinion at least, was the greatest Lamb scholar of his time and had made a very important collection of Lamb.

Mr. FARRELL: Was he on a faculty somewhere?

Mr. PEAL: No, North was head of the Scribner's rare book department. I guess that was his title.

Mr. FARRELL: And this was his secretary? She had collected them?

Mr. PEAL: He left them to his secretary.

Mr. FARRELL: Did you get the whole batch?

Mr. PEAL: No, I didn't get everything. I think there was one letter that the University of Texas outbid me on. I got up to \$2,000 on the letter, and I had already been warned that Drake, who was bidding against me, was acting for Amon Carter. Well, if I had gone to \$5,000, which I couldn't afford to do, he still would have added \$250 more. So I just dropped out. This letter where I was outbid was the famous letter in which Lamb tells Coleridge about the household disaster—his sister having gone insane and killed his mother and wounded his father. And it is one of the the most important of all the Lamb letters. But, in the same sale, I acquired



other letters to Coleridge that are of a rate of about \$400 apiece—which was a great bargain even then, and, of course, would be a much greater bargain now! So it was a question of the power of money against fast footwork among the opponents, and both of us got something out of it—but I didn't get the famous letter!

Mr. FARRELL: You spoke of bidding at the sale. Were you there in person?

Mr. PEAL: I was sitting right by my bidder.

Mr. FARRELL: Where was it?

Mr. PEAL: It was at the Parke Bernet Galleries. Somehow I had gotten \$10,000 or \$11,000, and I expended the whole thing on this Lamb.

Mr. FARRELL: In that one sale?

Mr. PEAL: In that one sale. I think it was more than one day. Book collectors began to realize that I was in the market for Lamb, and I began to get lots of tip-offs and lots of help. And I got a London bidder who helped out a great deal, and gradually built them up one at a time.

Mr. FARRELL: Who was that? Who was your London bidder?

Mr. PEAL: Winnie Myers.

Mr. FARRELL: What was in this collection? What were some of the high points? If you spent \$10,000 in a few days you must have gotten some real. . . .

Mr. PEAL: Well, the Manning letters. That ran up to a little over \$500.

Mr. FARRELL: Is that Cardinal Manning?

Mr. PEAL: No, no. Thomas Manning—he's the T.M. of Lamb's "Roast Pig." And he appears in a good many of the Elia essays. Coleridge had married and had moved down just south of the Bristol Channel. Coleridge appears, Coleridge's sister appears, and Lamb, who's off in London, sort of gets left out of the race. And Charles Lloyd was having mental troubles, and in and out of hospitals and so on. And Lamb and Coleridge immediately take a tremendous friendship with one another which, of course, lasted the rest of their lives.

Lamb, who never had been able to go to a university or anything like that, but who had what Coleridge himself called a sort of a "mechanic simplicity of taste," well, got left out in this. He was the little Lamb who was against the big rams of Wordsworth and Coleridge, who were engaged in the production of the *Lyrical Ballads* that changed all of poetry all over the world



Dear Lamb  
Oct. 11<sup>th</sup>  
1810 + I  
Just going to  
leave Calcutta for  
God knows where!  
very strange in mind  
cannot write.  
Give one of these boxes of  
India Ink to ~~you~~  
Mary the other to  
my brother Edward when  
you see him.  
I'll write to you before I am  
out of the bounds of civil ~~Britain~~  
Thomas Manning

A letter to Charles Lamb from Thomas Manning, on leaving Calcutta, 11 October 1810. (W. Hugh Peal Collection, Department of Special Collections & Archives, University of Kentucky Libraries)



in one year—published in 1798. Well, Lamb looked around for other friends, and one of them he made was a young Cambridge student by the name of Thomas Manning. And he and Manning became almost as devoted friends, and if Manning had stayed in England it is possible that the course of literature might have been further changed, because he might eventually have won Lamb away from Coleridge.

Mr. FARRELL: And what besides the Manning letters were in that batch?

Mr. PEAL: Well, there was quite a substantial number of Lamb letters. There was the famous 1800 letter to Coleridge in which he gives an account of where they stand. There was a letter to his landlord. There's a joking letter or two. And then four or five of the ordinary run of letters around that period and then a whole slough of later letters. There must have been twenty Lamb letters plus the Manning letters plus a long string of books.

Mr. FARRELL: Well, that was the beginning, then, of Lamb. How did you get into Coleridge?

Mr. PEAL: Well, yes. I suppose you might say that you can't be interested in Lamb without simultaneously being interested in Coleridge. You really, if you are interested in those two, you almost automatically revert then to Wordsworth, and you almost automatically revert to Southey. I, from the very beginning, had gotten some good ideas from edited works. I knew that in order to get anywhere in the field I had to collect not only Lamb, Coleridge, Wordsworth, and Southey and Lloyd, to the extent that I could, but their friends. And that led me to Thomas Noon Talford—Tommy Traddles of *David Copperfield*, and, of course, Thomas Noon Talford led me to a great many other people.

Mr. FARRELL: And then does your collection give a fairly complete picture of this era?

Mr. PEAL: Well, I think so. I think nobody can get anything like a complete picture, so that probably is putting it too hard. But I think you get, certainly, the flavor of the whole period. I got a famous letter of Lamb to Wordsworth, for instance, and Wordsworth had dedicated a poem to him. Lamb said they had nearly worn out that page, but they hadn't even looked onto the other pages!

Mr. FARRELL: Reading it over and over!

Mr. PEAL: The Moncure Biddle sale was a very interesting one.

Mr. FARRELL: Tell me about it.



Mr. PEAL: Well, Moncure Biddle was a member of the very famous Biddle family in Philadelphia, and he acquired a magnificent library of eighteenth-century and nineteenth-century color-plate books, together with a few of an earlier date. He seemed to have the same kind of innate feel for that I'd had for Lamb. He offered his library for sale in 1954, and I got several items which have been stars in my library ever since. I got one of the first editions of Philip Miller's *Figures of the Most Beautiful, Useful, and Uncommon Plants: Described in the Gardener's Dictionary*, 1760.

In the same sale I got one of the finest of all his herbals. This one's in three different editions which he'd bought and had bound together. I'm talking about Biddle, and he published a little book about them. Brunfels, Otto Brunfels, three volumes bound in one. Strassburg, John Scott, 1536, 1539, and 1540. It's contemporary calf over boards. Then in the same sale I got one of the real stars in my library—William Curtis's *Flora Londinensis*, the wildflowers around London.

Mr. FARRELL: What's the period of that? Is that eighteenth century?

Mr. PEAL: There are six volumes, 1777, and it's one of the few sets with the missing fifth volume, which for some reason is very scarce. Now my bidder against me for that was a Philadelphia bookseller that used to buy these books and break them up and sell them individually for framing—and it's one of the stars of the library. And I went through the whole six volumes, which were dirty and battered! Everybody else was afraid of them because they were so dirty they couldn't go up and handle them unless they took heroic measures, as I did!

Mr. FARRELL: You've mentioned then a bit about your association in the book world in New York, and you've mentioned the book dealers, and you were active in the Grolier Club.

Mr. PEAL: I never was really very active in the Grolier Club. I went, and I knew them all, and I had a lot of fun. I never held any offices or spent any time over club problems and so on, but just a pleasant place to go and meet people.

Mr. FARRELL: And did you meet some of the, I suppose, most of the leading dealers and collectors?

Mr. PEAL: Yes, of course. Close personal friendships with Gordon Ray and Waller Barrett, who's now down at the University of Virginia—know him very well and very happily friends. Now,



those are the kind of fellows that like, some of them anyway, like committee meetings and so on, and I never did. But I did have lots of friendship and fellowship through them.

Mr. FARRELL: Have you ever landed a clinker, a forgery?

Mr. PEAL: Never landed an important clinker in anything. Now, I have a book, which—it has an eighteenth-century inscription in it, “presented by C.L. to” . . . or presented, I think, from Coleridge to Lamb. I’m sure that that book is there to take a little of the edge off the joke in “Two Kinds of People” that irritated Coleridge so much. Lamb wrote the essay—there’re two kinds of people, and he named two of them. And one was his friend S.T.C., and the other was, what was Coleridge’s name he served with in the army? It was the same man but two different names, and he built up the whole thing! He borrowed books and didn’t bring them back. And when he brought them back they were torn and had a little butter on the pages! But the other one, the S.T.C., was so careful with books that he not only brought them back but enriched them with priceless comments in the margin! I don’t own those letters, but he was really quite annoyed! I mean Coleridge was really quite annoyed, and he appealed to various mutual friends, and he stopped this joke. Lamb never let a joke die. He pushed these jokes through for decades! So, here’s an example, if it’s authentic, and I think this one’s authentic. I think we’ve really got a book given by Coleridge to Lamb.

Mr. FARRELL: Well, your collection has a center there in the Romantics. You’ve named the principals and also your manuscripts and books. Well, how about these incunables? How did you pick those up? We’ve seen four or five.

Mr. PEAL: Oh, just sitting there, and they came up for a small amount, and I bought them.

Mr. FARRELL: How about these odds and ends, like the Doves Bible or the Bremer Presse Bible?

Mr. PEAL: Well, I have always had a little interest in fine books. Not necessarily fine printing. I don’t have terribly good eyes. When I have friends come in I always like to show them the Baskerville Bible, that’s the Cambridge one, and tell them that some people think that this is the finest title-page in the English language, and everybody oohs and aahs about that. When you get 500 people clamoring through your house—and trying to entertain them on Garden Week or a special meeting of a Washington society or something, you’ve got to pick out something.



Mr. FARRELL: You have some variety to entertain a whole variety of friends.

Mr. PEAL: That's right. I remember an old lady and I trying our best—she was an old German lady that had lived in this country for fifty of her seventy years, but she still remembered her German and everything, and she and I got out that Bremer Presse and tried to sing the CXXXVII Psalm—"By the rivers of Babylon, there wee sate down, yea we wepte: When we remembered Zion. Wee hanged our harpes upon the willowes, in the midst thereof." Well, everyone else was so amused.

Your eyes begin to open sometimes when you discover really what you have. Now I'll give you an example, for instance. One time a bunch of Voltaire letters came up at the Parke Bernet, and they were sold individually. And I went up and looked at them, and there was one fairly short letter on the Calas case which was perhaps the high point of Voltaire's whole life. The point at least that we like to think of in showing that he was a great and determined man.

Mr. FARRELL: What was the date of this?

Mr. PEAL: Around 1760. Well, I told David Kirschenbaum, my bidder, that I wanted that one, and I'd be willing to go up to \$500 for it, but the others I wouldn't spend more than a hundred dollars apiece for.

They were just run-of-the-mill Voltaire letters. He was one of the first people to have a full-time secretary, and the letters are nearly always in a secretarial hand, although signed by him. Well, I got it maybe for \$100, but people were buying them by the inch. That's what it comes down to. Well, I called up my friend Ira Wade, a professor of French at Princeton, who was one of the editors of the Voltaire letters working under Theodore Besterman. I said, "I've got a Calas case letter," and discussed it, and, as nearly as he could figure out from his notes, they already had it. After all, the thing was circulating around and being sold at Parke Bernet, and it never really occurred to me that I was doing anything more than being careful. Well, I relaxed, and catalogued it, and put it away. About a year later I got a sheaf of letters from David Kirschenbaum. Besterman had heard about this letter, and he wrote to Gordon Ray, and Gordon wrote to Swann, and Swann wrote to Kirschenbaum, and Kirschenbaum wrote to me—could he have a copy of the letter? Well, I sent a letter to circulate back that I was sending Mr. Besterman a copy of the letter. And I



got back a very interesting letter from Besterman, and we corresponded for a couple of years. He lived in Banbury, outside of Oxford.

Mr. FARRELL: I thought he was living in Switzerland.

Mr. PEAL: Well, I think he did live in Switzerland for years. Incidentally, I've never talked to him personally, but his letters sound like a man who has spoken English all of his life. Well, he sent me a very interesting little book called *Le Gout des Manuscripts*, a little Besterman lecture on why men love manuscripts and autograph letters. I remember in that he makes the point that if someone had been able to keep Napoleon's laundry list—*le gout des manuscripts!* So, that was one of my really interesting adventures.

Mr. FARRELL: Well, Mr. Peal, I think we have probably touched then a number of the high points of your library and collecting career.