

*A tribute by the students of
ART 397: Exhibition Processes
In conjunction with
the exhibition:*

The Prints of Mary Wallace Kirk

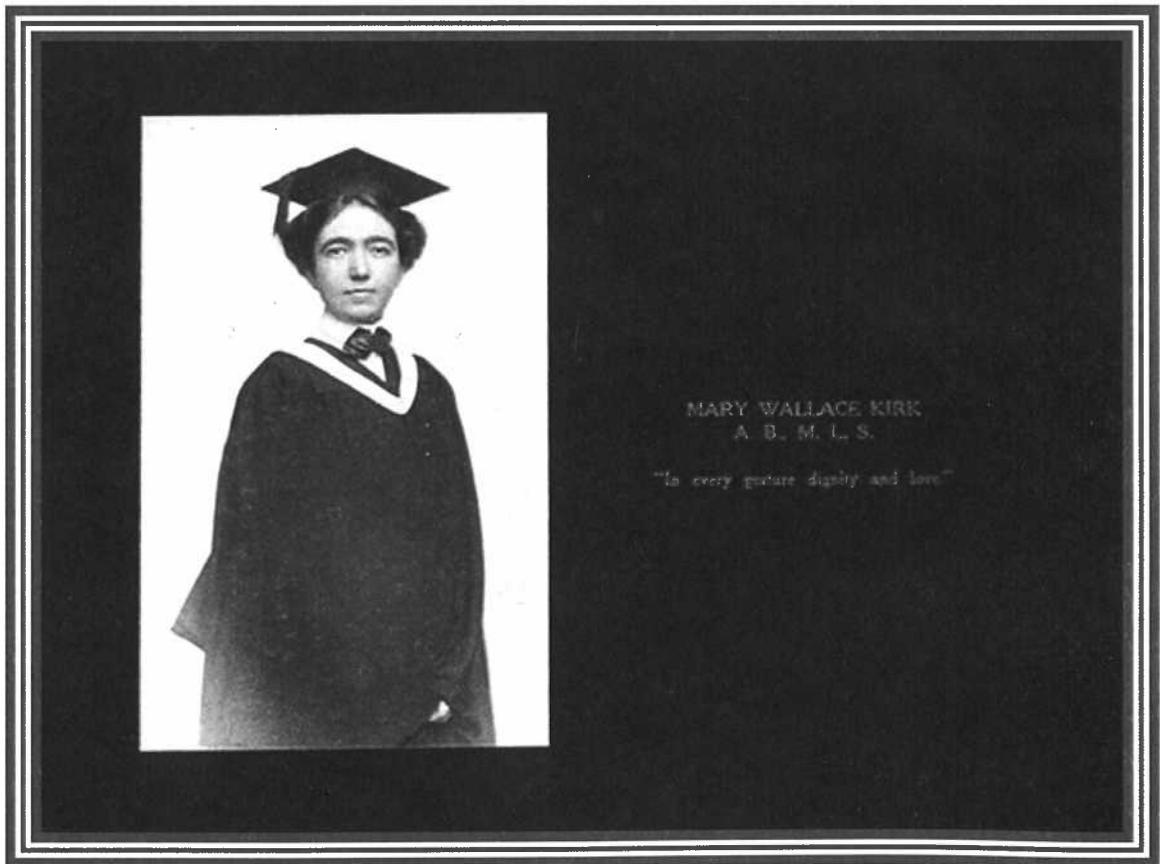
Spring 2015

MARY WALLACE KIRK graduated from Agnes Scott as treasurer and poet of the class of 1911. She returned to our college in 1917 and was elected to the Board of Trustees, on which she served for six decades, until her death in 1978. Not only was Kirk one of the first women elected as a trustee of a southern college, but she may also have been the longest serving trustee of any college. As author and artist, she created words and images that speak to the nostalgia of a by-gone era. Her poetic accounts of her family's home in Tuscumbia, Alabama and intricate etchings of cabins in a Southern landscape transport

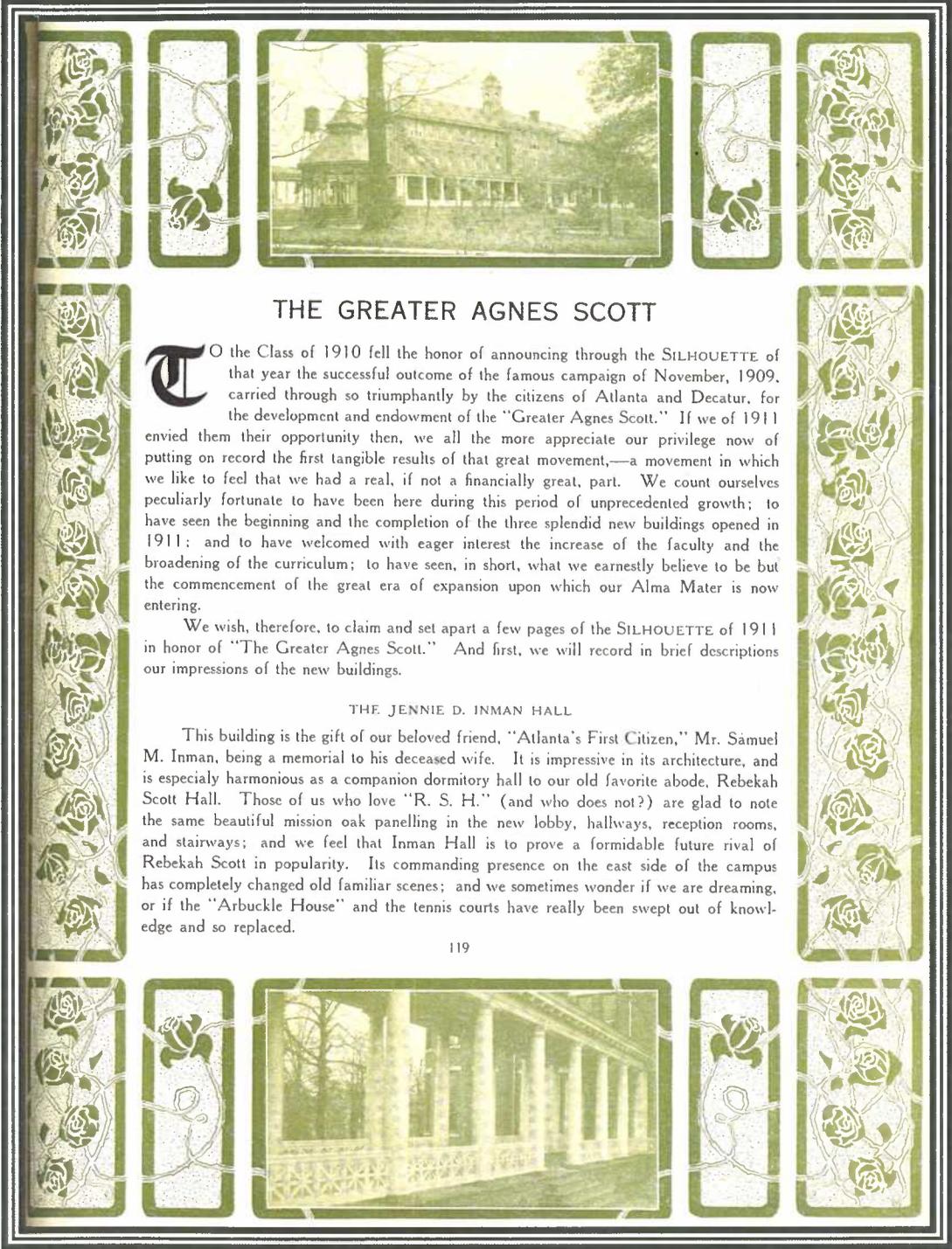
us back to that time. She was a true steel magnolia and embodied the refinement and grace to which any Agnes Scott woman would aspire. It has been a sincere pleasure getting to know her through this project, and a delight to welcome her spirit back to campus with the help of the Georgia Museum of Art and Dana Fine Arts, Agnes Scott College.

-Leah Owenby, '01

*Assistant to the Fine Arts and Dalton Gallery
Manager of the Permanent Collection
Dana Fine Arts, Agnes Scott College*



*Mary Wallace Kirk's senior portrait, Agnes Scott College Silhouette, 1911
A.B. signifies her degree (Bachelor of Arts)
M.L.S. signifies her membership in the Mnemosynean Literary Society*



THE GREATER AGNES SCOTT

TO the Class of 1910 fell the honor of announcing through the SILHOUETTE of that year the successful outcome of the famous campaign of November, 1909, carried through so triumphantly by the citizens of Atlanta and Decatur, for the development and endowment of the "Greater Agnes Scott." If we of 1911 envied them their opportunity then, we all the more appreciate our privilege now of putting on record the first tangible results of that great movement,—a movement in which we like to feel that we had a real, if not a financially great, part. We count ourselves peculiarly fortunate to have been here during this period of unprecedented growth; to have seen the beginning and the completion of the three splendid new buildings opened in 1911; and to have welcomed with eager interest the increase of the faculty and the broadening of the curriculum; to have seen, in short, what we earnestly believe to be but the commencement of the great era of expansion upon which our Alma Mater is now entering.

We wish, therefore, to claim and set apart a few pages of the SILHOUETTE of 1911 in honor of "The Greater Agnes Scott." And first, we will record in brief descriptions our impressions of the new buildings.

THE JENNIE D. INMAN HALL

This building is the gift of our beloved friend, "Atlanta's First Citizen," Mr. Samuel M. Inman, being a memorial to his deceased wife. It is impressive in its architecture, and is especially harmonious as a companion dormitory hall to our old favorite abode, Rebekah Scott Hall. Those of us who love "R. S. H." (and who does not?) are glad to note the same beautiful mission oak panelling in the new lobby, hallways, reception rooms, and stairways; and we feel that Inman Hall is to prove a formidable future rival of Rebekah Scott in popularity. Its commanding presence on the east side of the campus has completely changed old familiar scenes; and we sometimes wonder if we are dreaming, or if the "Arbuckle House" and the tennis courts have really been swept out of knowledge and so replaced.

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Mary Wallace Kirk Age 6, reprinted with permission from Locust Hill, University of Alabama Press

Remembering Mary Wallace Kirk

A college lives in its members. The buildings, the endowment, the library collection amount only to what they are used for. The curriculum, the faculty, the administration, and the student body, all subject to change, can lose their distinctive composition unless enough of them, and enough alumnae and trustees, carry the idea of the college in them and keep putting it into effect. These thoughts, summoned by the death of Mary Wallace Kirk, lead to a serious question: how many survivors will it take to carry the share of Agnes Scott she kept alive?

She was a trustee for more than sixty years, possibly longer than anyone else has ever served on the board of a college. Nobody is in a position to know all she did for Agnes Scott. Each of the four presidents, each of the board chairmen except the first (George Washington Scott) shared part of her tenure, but no official shared it all. Several times a year, for generations, she traveled the three hundred miles from her home to the campus, not only for meetings of the whole board but for vital committee sessions at which the course of the college was set and maintained. As a rule, she came several days in advance. She stayed at the Alumnae House and spent three days visiting everybody she knew on campus- and she always knew a good cross-section- to sound out the current state of affairs. These interviews were full of merriment but also doubly charged with purpose: Mary Wallace found out what was going on at the College and she broached, to the people she saw, the issues facing the board and the complexity of the questions the board had to decide. By the time of the meeting, she was

ready to take an informed part in the discussion and to bring to it a sense of campus attitudes toward the matters in hand.

At one critical period several decades ago, there was a clear danger that the College would fall under anti-intellectual control. It was Mary Wallace Kirk, with the very few other alumnae on the board at that time, who saved the identity of Agnes Scott. The struggle was tense, at times desperate, and went on for months. Mary Wallace was deeply alarmed, but she never lost her head or even her temper. Patiently talking away in that beautifully modulated voice of hers, she made the round of her uncommitted fellow trustees again and again, explaining the nature of the peril and gradually convincing them of its reality. Another kind of person would have charged furiously into battle, stiffened the opposition, and loudly lost. She held firmly in mind the fact- and it was a fact- that those who posed the threat were acting from motives as high as hers. They simply did not put the College first, as a college, but wanted to make it serve ends it could not serve without sacrificing its academic integrity. These ends were not in themselves bad, but they were not those of a college. Mary Wallace made this difficult point clear and finally evoked heroic support from some trustees who were under excruciating pressure to vote the other way. Of all her contributions to Agnes Scott, this must have been the greatest.

At times when the essence of the College seemed secure, Mary Wallace tried to encourage what she called the amenities on campus. As president of the Alumnae Association in the



early 1920s, she oversaw the building of the Alumnae House. She and fellow officers, in expanding the Association to national scope from the Atlanta-Decatur club it had been, had investigated the alumnae organizations of several Eastern colleges and had heard that Vassar had a guest house for alumnae. They enlisted the interest of Dr. Frank Gaines, the president of Agnes Scott, and with a grant from the board of trustees built the first alumnae house in the South, the second in the nation. They established the policy that the Alumnae House and its garden should be maintained by alumnae volunteers as an especially attractive part of the campus, which in the 1920s and 1930s was austere to the point of bleakness. I don't know how much Mary Wallace had to do with the changes that brought color and better design to the campus as a whole, but I know she advocated them and also worked for an expanded art program. As an artist herself, whose etchings had appeared successfully in a dozen exhibits from Connecticut to California, she could put more than enthusiasm into the effort. She published poetry too, and was interested in creative writing by students and faculty. But balancing her aesthetic understanding was a thoroughgoing practicality: as a farmer, she was realistic about money, and she supported a sound, conservative fiscal policy that protected Agnes Scott from damaging emergencies and made long-range planning possible.

She was born the year Agnes Scott was founded. She grew up in the friendly big

old house in Tuscumbia, Alabama, where she lived for the rest of her life. As an only child petted by a large Southern household of three generations and several memorable servants, she grew up happy. Her grandfather, General John D. Rather, a prominent lawyer and the retired president of a railroad, used to drive her to school every day in his phaeton, call for her at noon, and come again for her in the afternoon. When she went to Agnes Scott, her mother wrote to her every day, and her most delicate clothes were sent home to the family laundress. This sort of backing can sap or strengthen, depending on what circumstances I don't pretend to know, but the Kirks and Rathers must have known. Mary Wallace's record in college was so good that she was elected to Phi Beta kappa when Agnes Scott got its chapter years after her graduation, and she was so outstanding a person that when she was still in her twenties she became one of the first two alumnae to be elected to the board of trustees.

A picture of Mary Wallace at the age of two shows the expression that characterized her face eighty-five years later: smiling, expectant, looking up and forward. The picture appears in her book *Locust Hill*, a radiant reminiscence of her house and the generations that lived there. To visit her there, in the comfort of the house and the beauty of the garden, was to wonder that she ever left it. But she did, not only for Agnes Scott but for war work in the First World War and then for travel abroad. If you pressed her to tell you about her latest trip, it would turn out that she had spent part of the time with Bernard Berenson or Elizabeth Bowen or a



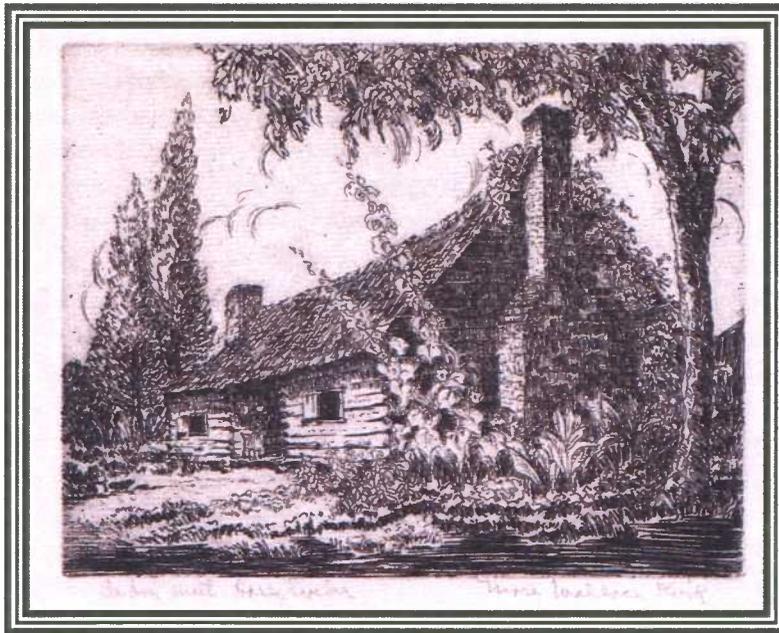
Scottish classicist or an Irish painter. Friends from distant parts of the world would make their way to Tuscumbia to see her. She was as little provincial as it is possible for anyone with roots to be. I wish I could find a letter she wrote me in 1950 when I was studying for the summer at Oxford. It consisted mainly of a list of books she hoped I could find for her: they were not available in America and were not readily to be come by even in England. Contemporary art of all sorts, especially fiction and poetry by unpublicized writers, made up the bulk of it. I put it all in the lap of Blackwell's, and I may have just given them her letter. I have looked for it in the hope of reproducing it here, as partial evidence of her interests.

Mary Wallace was a stalwart Presbyterian. She taught Sunday school, held local and state

office, and loved her church in Tuscumbia, which her ancestors had helped to establish and in which generations of her family had grown up. A severe trial of her later years came when the congregation of this church, with the sole exception of Mary Wallace, decided to leave the national body. She voted firmly against the move, but took defeat with grace. Sad but without rancor, she transferred her membership to the church in Florence and continued in her cheerful faith. At her funeral there, her love for Agnes Scott was coupled in the minister's eulogy with her love for her church, and the townspeople I met told me that she had been strongly identified in the public mind with the College.

How many survivors will it take to carry her share of Agnes Scott? As arithmetic, the question is unanswerable. But now that she is gone, all of us will have to try harder. Her equal, as a single enduring embodiment of the College, may never come.

-Eleanor Hutchens, '40
*Professor of English,
Agnes Scott College
Director of Alumnae Affairs,
Director of Publicity,
President of the
Alumnae Association
Featured in 1978 Alumnae
Quarterly Magazine*



*Mary Wallace Kirk,
Cabin with Hollyhocks,
Etching*



Mary Wallace Kirk's Agnes Scott – A Great Era of Expansion

On July 6, 1889, in Tuscumbia, Alabama, James T. and Ella Rather Kirk welcomed their daughter Mary Wallace into the world. Eleven days later, on July 17, Rev. Frank Gaines, pastor of Decatur Presbyterian Church, called together a group of men for a meeting in his study, to “advise as to the need and feasibility of establishing in Decatur a school for young ladies and girls.” This school, Decatur Female Seminary, opened on September 24, 1889 as an elementary school, then quickly became Agnes Scott Institute and finally, in May 1906, Agnes Scott College.

The paths of Mary Wallace Kirk and Agnes Scott College would connect in September 1907, when 18-year-old Mary Wallace would arrive as a freshman at the college. For the next 71 years, until Mary Wallace Kirk's death in 1978, the woman and the school would be intimately connected.

Agnes Scott, after just one year as a college, was much smaller than it is today, both in numbers and in physical size. In the year Mary Wallace Kirk entered, there were 180 students and 12 teaching faculty, counting President Gaines, who taught Bible. Only 3 of the faculty had Ph.D. degrees. Coursework was largely prescribed, with few electives. There were no majors. The campus was shared with Agnes Scott Academy, the prep school that had spun off from the Institute. During two of Kirk's years as an undergraduate the

Academy students outnumbered the College students. There were 14 students in her graduating class, out of a student body of 173. The teaching faculty had grown to 18, still only 3 with a Ph.D. Majors were first instituted for new students in the 1910-11 catalog – the 9 possibilities were English, French, German, Latin, History, Biology, Chemistry, Physics or Mathematics.

When Mary Wallace Kirk entered Agnes Scott College, the campus was just the area around Main, Rebekah, and the quad. There were 7 buildings. There was great need for additional dormitory space, for a better science building, and for a library (which during this period was simply a room on the first floor of Main). In order to begin meeting these needs, the land on which Inman, Evans, Walters, Winship, Alston, and McCain now stand was purchased while Kirk was a student. During her sophomore and junior years the College held a major fund-raising campaign to support the needed development.

Kirk thus had the opportunity to experience, from the perspective of a student, first an identified need, then the raising of funds, and finally the construction of three major buildings on campus – Inman, Lowry Science Hall (which stood where Walters is now), and a Carnegie library (which stood in the southeast corner of the quad), all of which were completed during her senior year. The



1911 Silhouette, of which Kirk was co-editor, reported on behalf of the class of 1911 that “We count ourselves peculiarly fortunate to have been here during this period of unprecedented growth; to have seen the beginning and the completion of the three splendid new buildings opened in 1911; and to have welcomed with eager interest the increase of the faculty and the broadening of the curriculum; to have seen, in short, what we earnestly believe to be but the commencement of the great era of expansion upon which our Alma Mater is now entering.”

In October 1917, Mary Wallace Kirk was given the opportunity to contribute much more directly to the “great era of expansion” when she became one of the first women elected to the Agnes Scott College Board of Trustees. She served in this position for the rest of her life, a term of 61 years, with an enthusiasm and dedication well chronicled in the preceding article by Dr. Eleanor Hutchens. In 1919 she was elected President of the Agnes Scott Alumnae Association. During the three years she served in this position she oversaw the building of the Anna Young Alumnae House, the first of many building projects by which Agnes Scott would grow during the Mary Wallace Kirk years.

As trustee, Kirk saw the addition of Bucher Scott Gymnasium (1925 - where the main part of Alston is now), steam plant and laundry (1928), Buttrick (1930), McCain Library (1936), Presser (1940), the Winship Infirmary (1949 - where the bookstore/post office wing of Alston is), Evans Dining Hall

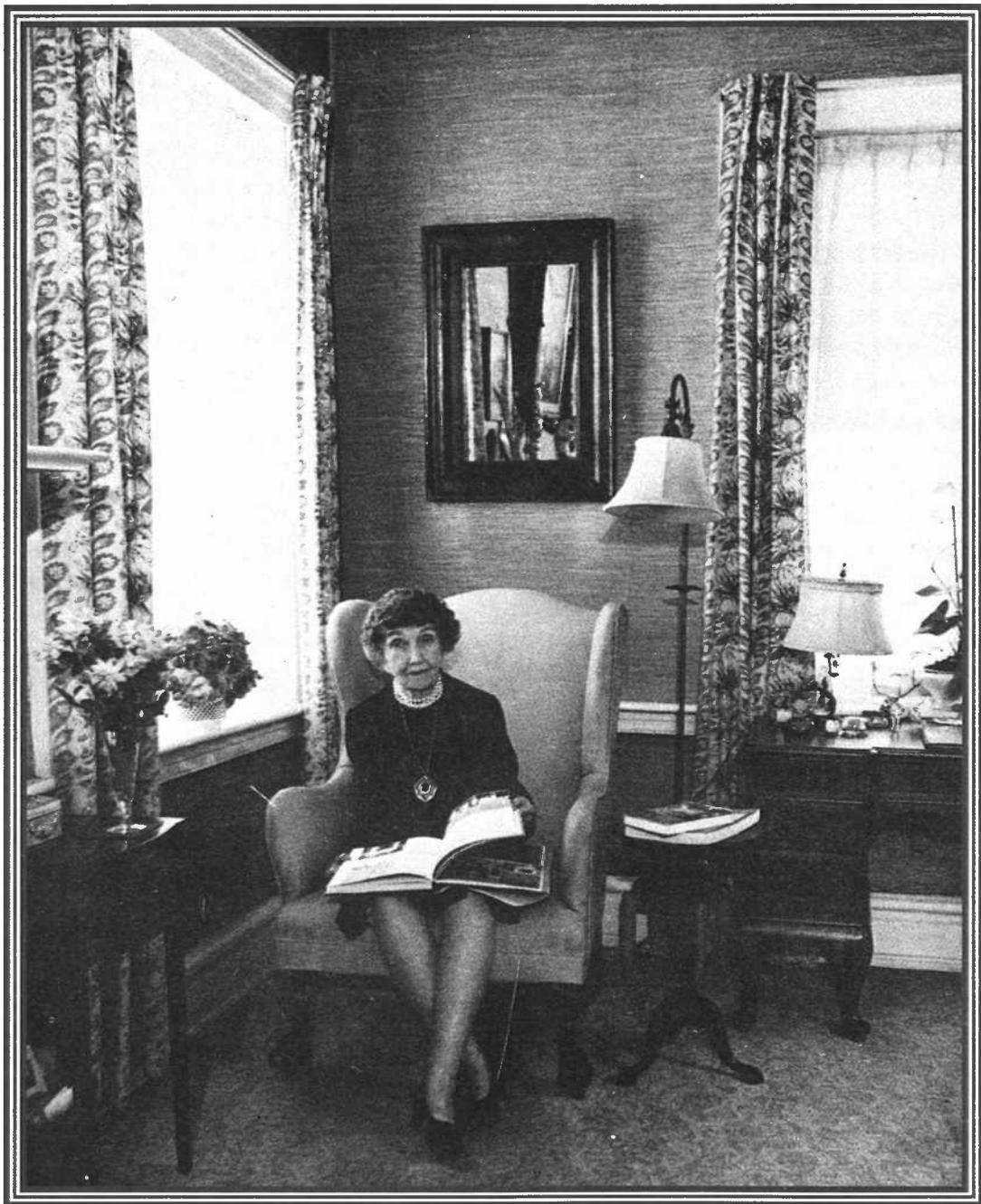
and Bradley Observatory (1950), Campbell and the President’s Home (1951), Hopkins (1953), Walters (1956), Winship (1963), and Dana (1965). The campus had grown to over 100 acres by the time of her death. Kirk would recognize most of the campus as it is today - only 4 buildings would be totally new to her: Woodruff Gym (1988), Alston Campus Center (2001), Bullock Science Center (2003), and Smith Chapel (2008).

Equally if not more important for the development of the college over these years was the increase in the student body and the improvement of the faculty and curriculum. At the time of Mary Wallace Kirk’s death in 1978, there were 566 students. The catalog listed 89 teaching faculty, 59 with an earned Ph.D. There were 21 departmental majors, 5 interdepartmental or intra-departmental majors, and self-designed majors available.

There were many people involved in this great expansion of Agnes Scott from 1907 to 1978, but certainly there were few as consistently active, enthusiastic, and dedicated to the improvement of Agnes Scott College as Mary Wallace Kirk. At the end of her life, she probably still felt herself “peculiarly fortunate” to have been so intimately involved with Agnes Scott’s growth.

Marianne Bradley, ‘74
*Library Administrative Coordinator /
Archives Manager
McCain Library, Agnes Scott College*





*Mary Wallace Kirk in the chair by the South Window
reprinted with permission from Locust Hill, University of Alabama Press*

From “Doesn’t it ever rain in Alabama?”- The Prints of Mary Wallace Kirk

Kirk’s art training began at home, as her mother showed her “how to draw and paint” when she was still a child. Her first drawing book, left among her papers, dates from the first four months of 1900, when Kirk was only eleven years old; a note in this book indicates she was taking private art lessons. Unfortunately, student records do not exist for the Deshler Institute, and, according to the Office of the Registrar at Agnes Scott College, Kirk appears to have taken no course in studio art, although she did take several in art history.

In her forties, Kirk studied etching with Harry Sternberg at the Art Students League in New York City... and commented in her memoirs that her etching instructor (very likely Sternberg) “once asked with impatience, ‘Doesn’t it ever rain in Alabama?’” While she admitted that her prints “were always filled with sunshine,” she further commented that her instructor’s “favorite themes were mines and subways and dark foactories; [and] my little cabins in a sun-filled landscape offended him.”

Kirk’s style derives from two art movements that were active during her life. First was the etching revival ... Also influential for Kirk was the American Scene movement, a reaction to the beginnings of modernism. ... Regionalism (as the American Scene movement is sometimes

termed) is usually associated with the American Midwest... Southern Regionalists focused on the poorest and most rural area of the country. Almost all of Kirk’s prints were distinctly southern.

Kirk’s print number around eighty, with more than seventy etching, five linocuts, and two lithographs... Most of her etchings show the humble dwellings of the local rural poor, mostly African Americans. The reason for her interest in these structures can be found in her book *Cabins and Characters*: “Cabins, especially log cabins, are rapidly disappearing from the Southern landscape. Before these relics of an older day completely pass from the scene it seems fitting to make a pictorial record of them, and to try and capture some of the lowly charm that surrounded them.”

-Stephen Goldfarb, Ph.D.

**This essay is excerpted here with the permission of Georgia Museum of Art. The essay’s full text and color plates of Miss Kirk’s etchings are available in the Museum’s Bulletin, Bolume 24- 2014. Copies of the bulletin are available for sale in Dalton Gallery at Agnes Scott College throughout the course of the exhibition, “The Prints of Mary Wallace Kirk”, March 26, 2014-April 18, 2014.*





*Mary Wallace Kirk in her garden
reprinted with permission from Locust Hill, University of Alabama Press*

An April Dilemma

“It’s a sweet day,” as my old gardener would say, soft as a woman’s face under a veil and it is teeming with tender leaves and awakening buds. The intermittent showers have kept me running from garden to house and back again and I am torn apart. I want to work in the turned earth that glistens like mica after the April shower, to linger over the quick-silver drops left on the rose leaves and to pull the fresh, wet leaves from around the violets so they can take a deep breath. I want to drink in the fragrance of boxwood and of all the growing things, to listen to the songs of the birds, to stand and stare at the swaying cluster of wisteria and the purple pattern of iris that embroiders the garden. I want to watch the scarfs of mist floating over the low, blue line of hills. I want to read Herrick and Wordsworth and the Georgics and a thousand other things of sweet persuasion and content. I want the morning to last until I have absorbed sufficient of its mood to quiet my unquiet heart. I want to achieve the impossible, and be participator and spectator at the same time.

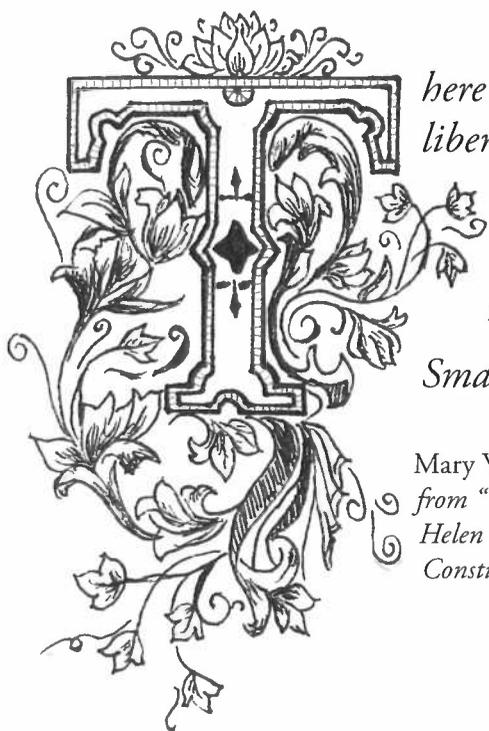
From “Of Days and Seasons at Locust Hill: from a journal by Mary Wallace Kirk”, 1963



Mary Wallace Kirk filled her life with passion for the arts and higher education for women. A codicil of her will, dated April 29, 1974, provided for the establishment of the James T. and Ella Rather Kirk Endowment Fund at Agnes Scott College. Named in honor of her parents, the fund is to be used to expand and enrich the academic programs in literature, history, music, art, and philosophy. In 1981, on the seventieth anniversary of her graduation, the Kirk Concert Series was inaugurated and has hosted guest musicians and composers on campus since that time. The Kirk Fund allows

for the Kirk Event Series, which includes not only concerts, but guest writers and scholars in the English department, the Ethics Program Lecture Series, visiting historians, and the Kirk Visiting Artist program. Miss Kirk's largeness of spirit is honored with these events, and through her generosity, Agnes Scott has been able to significantly enlarge its public offerings of arts and cultural experiences and provide for its students and the Atlanta community these special performances and opportunities to work with internationally distinguished musicians, artists, and scholars.





here is a place for a high class woman's liberal arts college.

*Being small is a big advantage.
America has gone wild over big-
ness and that's not good.*

Smallness is beautiful.

Mary Wallace Kirk, 1977
from "The South: A Sense of Place" by
Helen C. Smith, *The Atlanta Journal
Constitution*, May 17, 1977

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Eleanor Hutchens, '40,
*Professor of English Emerita, University of
Alabama in Huntsville*

Dr. Stephen Goldfarb

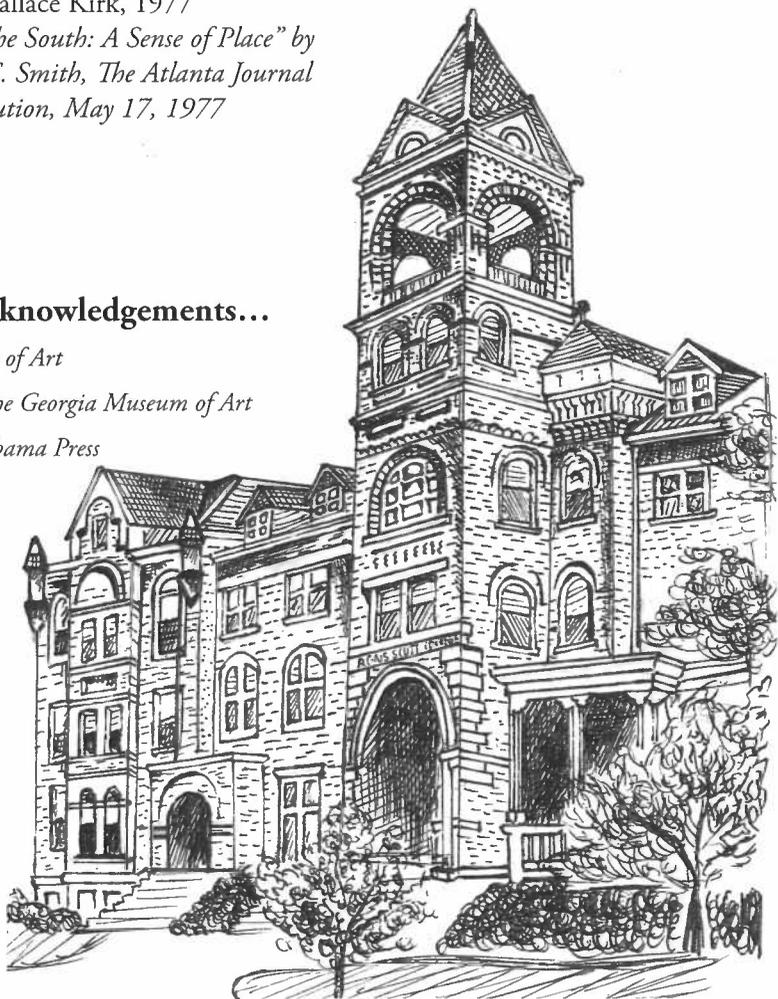
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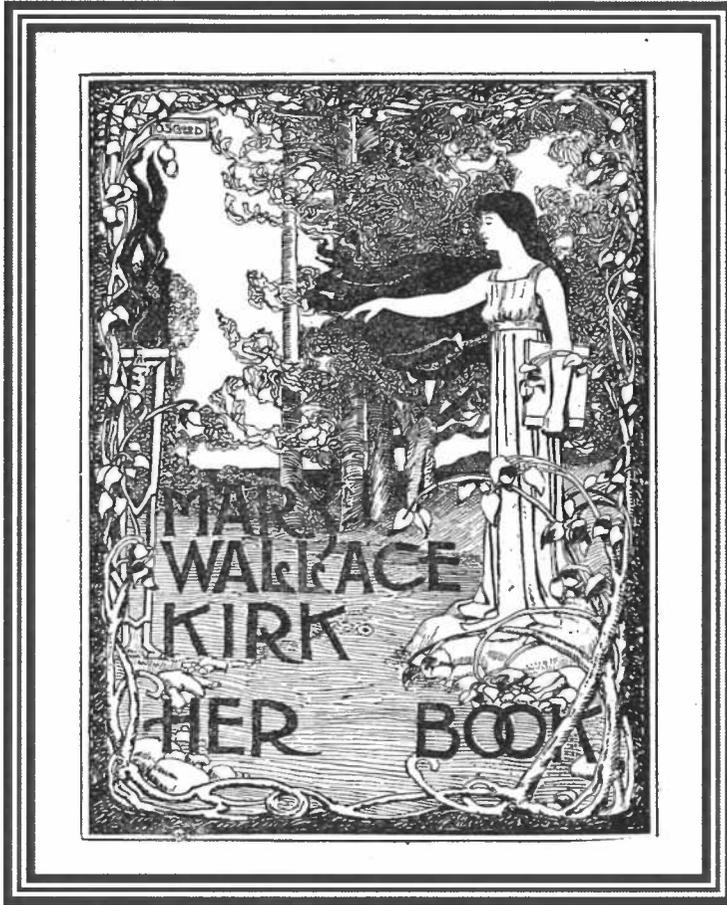
Dr. Kerry Pannell

*Vice President of Academic Affairs
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Xinyao Li, *illustrations this page*

Olivia O'Hern, *catalog set up*





AGNES SCOTT
COLLEGE