

# — hidden — HISTORY

**C**ollecting is a common hobby, inspired by an interest in some particular object, topic, place or person. People collect stamps, coins, buttons, shot glasses, comic books, Furbies...the list goes on and on.

The C. Elizabeth Boyd '33 Archives also acts as a collector, although the archives collection focuses on the preservation of the history of Wilson College, rather than the eventual value of Beanie Babies on eBay. That history takes many interesting forms, such as the archives' unique collection of Wilson College souvenir spoons.

Typically made of sterling silver (or, less frequently, nickel, steel or even wood) these souvenir spoons were designed to be ornaments and were proudly displayed on a spoon rack. Popular themes included buildings, landmarks, cities, famous people, names and historic events.

Souvenir spoons rose to popularity in Europe in the mid-1800s. Wealthy Americans, returning from European vacations, brought home these silver spoons to commemorate their travels. The first souvenir spoon produced in the United States, created by Galt Bros. of Washington, D.C., in 1890, depicted a simple profile of George Washington to celebrate the 100th anniversary of his presidency. A year later, Daniel Low, a jeweler in Salem, Mass., created his famous "witch" spoon after taking a vacation in Germany. Low is largely credited for sparking the souvenir spoon-collecting craze in America.

By June 1891, America was producing hundreds of its own souvenir spoon patterns. In 1893, approximately 27 million visitors to the Chicago World's Fair could view the largest exhibition of souvenir spoons in history. In addition to the World's Fair exposure, two other factors contributed to the spoon's popularity. Industrialization increased production, while the collapse of the silver market in 1893 also made silver available to many ordinary Americans for the first time.

The C. Elizabeth Boyd '33 Archives has two identical souvenir spoons representing Wilson College that were probably made in the late 1890s. Main Hall (now Lenfest Commons), together with Norland and Edgar halls, are engraved in the spoon's bowl. The handle is elaborately patterned with the words "Sally Wilson" and with a bust of Sarah Wilson herself as the finial.

One of these spoons originally belonged to Jean Davison Gordon '02, but bears the inscription "Ethyl-Dec. 1891" on the back. Its match originally belonged to Mary Cochran Sprecher, Class of 1897. A smaller, more delicate version of these spoons was donated by Mary Wheeler King '23, but originated in the late 1890s. The archives also possess a 1901 spoon decorated with a blue Wilson pennant and a small 1912 spoon sporting the Wilson seal.

The more elaborate Wilson spoons from the late 1890s were created during the height of spoon collecting's popularity. They serve to promote the College, as well as to pay tribute to the College's namesake donor. In later years, when the popularity of spoon collecting was waning, spoon designs became more simplistic, as evidenced by the 1912 spoon.

For more information on souvenir spoons and other college memorabilia, visit the Hankey Center's C. Elizabeth Boyd '33 Archives.

— Leigh Rupinski

