Overview of the Collection

Creator  
Gramatky, Hardie, 1907-1979

Title  
Hardie Gramatky papers

Dates  
1945-1972 (inclusive)

1945

1972

Quantity  
12.25 linear feet, (43 containers)

Collection Number  
Ax 438

Summary  
Hardie Gramatky (1907-1979) was the author and illustrator of several books for children, though he is best known for his character "Little Toot." The collection includes correspondence, illustrations, publicity, photographs, drafts, and artwork.

Repository  
University of Oregon Libraries, Special Collections and University Archives.

UO Libraries--SCUA

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Access Restrictions  
Collection is open to the public. Collection must be used in Special Collections and University Archives Reading Room. Collection or parts of collection may be stored offsite. Please contact Special Collections and University Archives in advance of your visit to allow for transportation time.

Additional Reference  
See the Current Collection Guide for detailed description and requesting options.

Languages  
English

Historical Note

Hardie Gramatky spent much of his early life, as he put it, "thrashing about for an anchor." In keeping with this nautical figure of speech, he would go on to establish himself as an author and illustrator for children by writing about a determined little tug boat. Gramatky demonstrates in this and his other works his deep respect for children's imagination and intelligence, as well for individual resilience in the face of adversity.

Gramatky was born in Dallas, Texas on April 12, 1907. After "thrashing" through a series of stints as a bank cashier, a logger, and a deck hand on a freighter, Gramatky attended Stanford University from 1926 to 1928. In 1930, following two more years of education at the Chouinard Art School in Los Angeles, he moved on to Hollywood to work for Walt Disney Productions, where he was Head Animator until 1936. While working for Disney, Gramatky married Dorothea Cooke in 1932 and "actually settled down."

Hardie Gramatky papers, 1945-1972
http://archiveswest.orbiscascade.org/ark:/80444/xv32971
After six years at Disney, however, Gramatky succumbed to "the ol' urge" to see the world and accepted a free lance position with Fortune magazine and moved to New York. While painting for Fortune, he traveled to a number of locations, ranging from the freezing Hudson Bay to the Bahamas. Gramatky's travels proved important to his development as a writer and illustrator for children. He believed that children are not only imaginative, but also genuinely curious about the world. He wanted to share his experiences and observations with them. "A child," said Gramatky, "likes to know that what you write for him is essentially based on fact. Nonsense and an imaginative story are part of the fun of reading, but more important to him is that there does exist such a place as the Grand Canal in Venice or that there truly was a 'chicken and duck man' high in the Andes Mountains of South America. These are things I have seen myself and an impression I like to carry to my reader." Such sharing of the world he had seen is a mark of Gramatky's respect for his young audience, with whom he viewed himself as participating in "a creative venture."

Yet it was during a break from his travels for Fortune that Gramatky came across the subject that would earn him success as a children's writer. Looking out his window at passing boats on the East River, he noticed "one tiny boat" that "stood out among the rest." That tiny boat became the tug Little Toot, the title character in his first book. Published in 1939, Little Toot was an immediate success. In that same year, Walt Disney made it into a movie, with a sound recording by Capitol Records. Little Toot also appeared on television, was heard on radio, and was a float in the Tournament of Roses Parade. Considered a classic in children's literature, it has been translated into a number of languages, including Thai, Finnish, and Danish.

From 1942 to 1944, Gramatky served in the United States Air Force as a supervisor of training films. After 1944, he went on to free lance work, writing and illustrating many more children's stories. These include sequels to Little Toot, as well as works on other subjects and characters, such as Sparky (1952), Bolivar (1961), and Nikos and the Sea God (1963). He also lectured widely on children's literature in schools and colleges. Over his career he won twenty top watercolor awards, including the Chicago International Award in 1942. His work has been displayed at a number of museums, including Brooklyn Museum, the Frye Museum in Seattle, the Chicago Institute of Art, and the Toledo Museum of Art.

As noted above, recurring in Gramatky's works and lectures is a profound respect for the young imagination. "Children have great creative ability," said Gramatky," and their imaginations are tremendous." Believing that "each child has his own small personality," Gramatky also revealed in his stories a trust in that individual personality's ability to succeed despite adversity, as is evident in Jean Mercier's remarks on Little Toot:

Most critics and readers agree that the doughty tugboat grabs and keeps its large audience, generation after generation, because of Toot's innate qualities. Always faced with overwhelming odds, sneered at because of his lack of size and strength, Little Toot is nevertheless the soul of pluck, comparable to the fellow who loses battles but wins the war. Boys and girls who are small exult in his victories.

Gramatky expresses the same sentiment in a comment on the reception of his books: "Someone has said, 'Little Toot is of the stuff of heroes.' This may well be true, for when it comes to facing the realities of the world, Little Toot is all of us." Again, it seems fitting that the man who began his creative life "thrashing about for an anchor" would find one by writing a story about a tugboat whose tenacity in the face of difficulty would make him a symbol of perseverance for generations of children beginning their lives. Gramatky died in Westport, Connecticut on April 29, 1979.

Content Description

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The University of Oregon, the University of Minnesota, and the University of Southern Mississippi combine to assemble original materials from the work of Hardie Gramatky. Oregon's Gramatky collection provides a comprehensive look at many aspects of the author/illustrator's creative process. The collection contains hundreds of pieces of original artwork drawn and painted for Gramatky's books, including final illustrations, color separation drawings, and sketch ideas. Manuscript materials represent Gramatky's reworking of drafts, synopses, and "mock-up" or "dummy" versions of his books. Business correspondence, publicity materials, and drawings and letters from children reveal Gramatky working collaboratively not only with publishers and industry representatives, but also with the young audience for whom he wrote.

The first series in the collection, Incoming Correspondence, contains letters, royalty statements and contracts from various companies with which Gramatky worked. Most extensive is the collection of correspondence from G. P. Putnam's Sons, which covers matters relating to sales, publication, right to audio recordings, and the scheduling of personal appearances. Overall, the series presents a close-up view of Gramatky's negotiations with the publishing industry, often revealing (specifically in the Putnam's letters) his congenial relationship with his publishers. This series also contains hundreds of drawings and letters from children from all over the United States based on events and characters in Gramatky's books. The drawings, which often include brief notes from the children, were done during the fifties, sixties, and seventies, demonstrating the continuing appeal of Gramatky's work. Gramatky's collection of these drawings reflects his belief and interest in childhood creativity.

The second series contains hundreds of illustrations for three of Gramatky's books: Bolivar, (1961), Nikos & the Sea God (1963), and Little Toot on the Grand Canal (1968). It also contains illustrations from the Ellsworth Elephant series (1959-1961) for Family Circle Magazine. Included are not only color and black and white illustrations used in the books, but also rough sketch ideas (in paint, pen, and pencil) leading up to the final versions of illustrations. Color separation and other preparatory drawings demonstrate Gramatky's active involvement in the complex process of producing an illustrated children's book.

The Writings series of the collection contains purely "textual" materials (such as manuscripts with extensive holograph revisions) as well as mixtures of text and artwork (such as mock-ups or "dummies" and notebooks). The collection contains tearsheets for Ellsworth Elephant and dummy pages for Bolivar. There is also an array of material from Nikos & the Sea God; in addition to numerous dummy pages, a synopsis of the book as well as notes on its genesis. However the total of the Little Toot on the Grand Canal set is by far the most diverse, including dummy pages, typewritten drafts with revisions, production and manuscript notes, storyboards, sketch books, and synopses.

The Publicity series contains clippings and advertisements both for Gramatky's books and for media events related to them. In addition, it includes fragments of Gramatky's own handwritten and typewritten lecture notes, as well as a typewritten script for an audio version of Little Toot Lost in the Fog. The lecture notes, which relate primarily to Nikos & the Sea God, demonstrate Gramatky's attempt to share what he considered important subjects (like Greek mythology and philosophy) with his young readers.

The Photographs series contains high quality black and white pictures of Gramatky with Walt Disney. In some of the photos, Disney and Gramatky are seen on a tugboat, celebrating the interrelationship of Gramatky, Walt Disney, and Little Toot.

Series six, Oversize Artwork, contains original artwork (and a few proofs) for Gramatky's works. Most of these paintings are very large and full color, representing some of the most perfected artwork in the collection.
The seventh and final series, "Children's Letters and Drawings," contains a large collection of fan mail and art from his young readers. Gramatky was inspired by these letters and carried this into his work; it becomes clear, from the large amount of material collected here, that Gramatky was deeply attached to his readers and that they were at the forefront of his mind when creating his timeless stories.

Administrative Information

Detailed Description of the Collection

Description

Guide to the Hardie Gramatky Papers

Names and Subjects

Subject Terms:
Authors, American--20th century
Children's literature, American--Authorship
Children's literature, American--Illustrations
Illustration of books--United States--20th century
Illustrators--United States

Personal Names:
Disney, Walt, 1901-1966
Gramatky, Hardie, 1907-1979

Form or Genre Terms:
Book illustrations
Correspondence
Photographs

Finding aid prepared by Katharine Colbert and Nathan Georgitis
2010

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