Everyday History:  
*Historical Artifacts from the Sweet Briar Collections*  
March 29-May 20, 2012  
Benedict Gallery  
Sweet Briar College

This installation features artifacts from the collection of the Sweet Briar Museum, which is devoted to the study and preservation of artifacts relating to the school’s history. Many of these items were collected over the past several decades for the museum from all around campus, as they were retired from regular use in various offices and departments. Some have been gifts from alumnae, staff, and faculty. Even this modest cross-section of the museum’s objects—the museum’s cataloged objects number in the hundreds—help illuminate a bit of the student experience, the life cycles of the campus’s oldest buildings, and the ever-evolving ways in which the College’s business is conducted.

Look at your cell ’phone, your textbook. Consider what your classrooms look like. Think about how you communicate with your family and what you talk about, and recall your last campus meal with your friends. The devices that you use to communicate and to learn, the ways in which you socialize, the buildings in which you study and live are all part of the on-going history of Sweet Briar College, itself a reflection of the world’s changing technology, global political and economic events, and social behavior.

Imagine, to the Class of 2112, your laptop will look as quaint as the library ink well on view here looks to us, generations after it was retired from use. What do you think the artifacts you leave behind will tell the future about how you studied, what your campus looked like, and what you thought about your experiences at Sweet Briar?

*Panoramic View of The Students of Sweet Briar College, 1912-1913*  
Thompson Photo Company, Poughkeepsie, New York  
photograph

This photo depicts the whole student body in the academic year 1912-1913, posed in the Quad facing the future location of Reid and Dew dormitories.

Notice the “sailor suits” some of the students wore. There is an order receipt for one such “middy suit” displayed on the opposite wall. These outfits, wool or cotton duck, were a popular costume for young women at the time, especially for school and sports uniforms, since they allowed for freedom of movement but were still modest.

Notice, too, the horse and buggy to the far right in the background—automobiles would have been a rare sight on campus a hundred years ago. They were so rare that the first drawings for the campus plan had no parking lots. To the extreme right is the location of today’s chapel, which would be built a little over 50 years after this photo was taken.

The building in the center background is The Refectory, what is today called Pannell (in honor of President Anne Gary Pannell). Constructed in 1906, it was designed by nationally-known architect
Ralph Adams Cram and was one of the four original campus buildings. The space now used as an art gallery inside Pannell was the College’s main dining room (for a time there were auxiliary dining rooms in the ground floors of Reid and Glass dormitories) and also served as a venue for dances and similar community events. The word “refectory,” often used in years past for dining areas at schools, monasteries and similar institutions, derives from the Latin for “refresh” or “restore.”

Selection of College Dining Room China, 1958-1974
Syracuse China, Syracuse, New York (rose pattern)
Mayer China, Beaver Falls, Pennsylvania (green design)
glazed ceramic

Sugar and creamer set from the College Dining Room, mid to late 20th century
silver-plate

Salad/desert fork and butter knife from the College Dining Room, mid to late 20th century
marked with “SBC” in script
Wallace Silversmiths
silver-plate

Into the 1970s, most meals—for example dinner and Sunday brunch—in the College dining rooms were served “family style” rather than today’s familiar cafeteria buffet.

These place settings were made by companies that specialized in china for institutional or commercial use and represent a wide variety of dates since the College had to replace broken items on a regular basis. The earliest on view is the rose pattern saucer, which dates to 1958. The latest is the plain green saucer, which dates to 1974.

Selection of Cookie Cutters from the College Kitchen, early to mid 20th century
metal

The College’s kitchens and pantries, which occupied the rear section and ground floor of Pannell, made meals from scratch (and the first cooks and other staff lived on site), and early floor plans note rooms (now classrooms and offices in Pannell) devoted to various functions such as baking. The nested set of cookie cutters here in the shape of the College crest is stamped “Made in France.”

Chime from the College Dining Room, ca. 1910-1940
wood and metal

This chime was probably used in the dining room to signal meal times.

Baluster Model for the Façade of Benedict Hall, ca. 1985
painted wood

Brick from Benedict Hall, ca. 1906
clay
These varied building components are evidence that the campus is an ever-changing place that requires regular maintenance and up-grades. The baluster model, for example, was made by staff in the Physical Plant department (formerly Buildings and Grounds) to replace rotted wooden components along the façade roofline of Benedict Hall. (When designing the campus buildings architect Ralph Adams Cram and the College’s first trustees probably sought to save money by using painted wood rather than stone.) The brick was collected by early museum staff when Benedict Hall was renovated in the late 1970s and is presumably original to the building. If so, it was made on campus by the College’s first builders, using clay dug on site.

Map of Sweet Briar Campus 1946
Barbara Golden Pound
lithograph on paper

Designed by Barbara Golden Pound ’47 of Columbus, Georgia, this bird’s-eye view the College shows tilled agricultural fields adjacent to the heart of campus. Note the absence of landmarks such as Guion science building and the Babcock Fine Arts Center. These would not be built for another 20 years. The map’s purpose is unknown. Perhaps it was intended as an advertisement or way-finding poster or may simply have been a memento for alumnae. The student artist went on to establish herself as a professional painter in her hometown and would be an active arts educator and philanthropist all her life.

Sweet Briar College Crest and Seal Design, 1908
Virginia Randall McLaws
pencil on paper

The College crest was designed by John M. McBryde, Jr., in 1905. He was a professor of English here 1906-1909 and was the son of one of the College’s first trustees and president of the board, John M. McBryde, Sr. At the time he was recruited for the Sweet Briar board, McBryde senior was president of Virginia Agricultural and Mechanical College and Polytechnic Institute—today’s Virginia Tech. He and his son had recently designed Virginia’s Tech’s crest and seal. When the Sweet Briar trustees asked McBryde senior to design its crest and seal, he deferred to his son the English professor.¹

This drawing was made by the College’s first professor of art after McBryde’s original scheme, featuring elements of Lord Amherst’s crest, arrows for the Fletcher family, Tudor roses, and the College motto “Rosam quae meruit ferat.” This appears to be the first official image of the crest and seal—though it differs in some minor details from those used today—and may have been used as a model for the various iterations of the seal on documents such as the College diploma and official stationary and for memorabilia such as class rings and commemorative gifts. The tears and dirt are evidence that it was much used. This drawing is essentially the “mother” of all the seals seen around campus to this day. The reverse is inscribed:

Sweet Briar College Seal Official Embossing Stamps, mid to late 20th century  
*steel, cast iron, other metals*

These stamps would have been used to emboss the College seal on official documents. They were retired from use—as was the diploma plate in this case—because they were worn with use and no longer stamped cleanly. The small square of paper here has been embossed using one of these.

Sweet Briar College Diploma Printing Plate, mid 20th century  
*Everett Waddey Company, Richmond  
*steel*

From the first, the College’s diploma was modeled on the design of that of the University of Vermont, the *alma mater* of Elijah Fletcher, the father of Sweet Briar’s founder. The earliest diplomas were larger than those issued today, though the design has remained the same. This steel plate is incised with the text and seal—they are appear backwards on the plate so that when the diploma is printed on paper everything reads correctly. The exact commencement date and the names of the College president, president of the board, and president of the faculty senate would have been filled in for each particular graduating class.

Ink well from the Library, ca. 1930s-1940s  
*molded Bakelite (synthetic plastic)*

A practical, mass-produced ballpoint pen was not available until the mid 1940s, so early Sweet Briar students and professors would have used a fountain pen, a reliable writing instrument in wide use since the 1880s. Unlike a current version of a fountain pen that may use cartridges of ink, earlier fountain pens contained a sort of bladder for ink and had to be refilled from a bottle or other reservoir. This ink well is actually missing the ink container, which would have been seated in the round bowl-like depression. The pen nib would have been placed in the small, round, nozzle-like opening to access the ink and draw it up into the bladder. The pen and bottle of ink on display are modern and are used here simply as props.

Clerk’s Window from the Campus Post Office, early to mid 20th century  
*wood and metal*

Since the school’s founding, Sweet Briar’s campus post office has been a lifeline for generations of lonely students. While that has been a constant, its location has not been fixed. The post office was at first in the basement of Sweet Briar House. Then it spent years in the ground floor of the faculty apartment house that now is home to the College’s marketing and development offices. The post office subsequently moved to the basement of Manson dormitory (formerly used as the chapel) and
most recently took up residence on the first floor of Glass dormitory (formerly a part of the kitchen that served the Glass dining room that preceded today’s Prothro Commons).

The stickers on this window help date it. The red white and blue strip that reads “Buy a Share in Freedom” dates from World War II. The text just above the window advertises air parcel post, a service offered by the U.S. Post Office beginning in 1948. At least one staff member who works at the College today and who lived on campus as a child recalls similar windows in use in the post office into the 1960s.

Selection of Family Letters, Photographs, Memorabilia, and College Receipts, 1918-1922
Gift of the family of Katherine Shenehon Child, Class of 1922

This selection of personal papers, donated in 2004 by Marjorie Child Carol of Two Harbors, Minnesota, gives a heartwarming and entertaining glimpse into the personal life of her mother, Katherine Shenehon. Shenehon’s father, Francis C. Shenehon, was an engineer in the upper Midwest and served for a time as dean of the School of Engineering at the University of Minnesota (his professional papers are housed there today). He was the author of Preservation of Niagara Falls (1911) and Regulation of Niagara and St. Lawrence Rivers (1919). Her mother’s family was from the South (with the family name of Byrd). Her sister, Clare Shenehon Boyd, had attended the Sweet Briar Academy—a college preparatory course of study for girls here that was dissolved in 1919.

Of particular note is Katherine’s first letter home (in the case, on the left), dated 17 September 1918 from Randolph dormitory room 253, which opens “Here it is the end of the first day and I am just crazy about it!” The much longer, anguished letter from May 1919, adjacent in the case, outlines her desire to transfer to the University of Minnesota because all her friends were leaving Sweet Briar, her teachers were, in her opinion, no good, and, perhaps most importantly, there were no young men here with whom to keep company. Katherine did return to Sweet Briar for her senior year and graduated in 1922.

Note, too, in various documents, her parents’ concern for her welfare as they helped her plan her travel by train, budget her pocket money, and select her first classes. In the upper left corner of the framed papers is a bill for tuition, room and board, and fees from the winter/spring term of 1922. The sum, $290.40 would be the equivalent in relative economic status of about $20,400 today. The bill is stamped “paid” from the office of William Bland Dew, the College’s first treasurer and the namesake of Dew dormitory.

The two small photos in the framed display show Katherine—in her dorm room and in a passport picture. The “king of hearts” playing card is inscribed as a Valentine to her father.

* See www.measuringworth.com