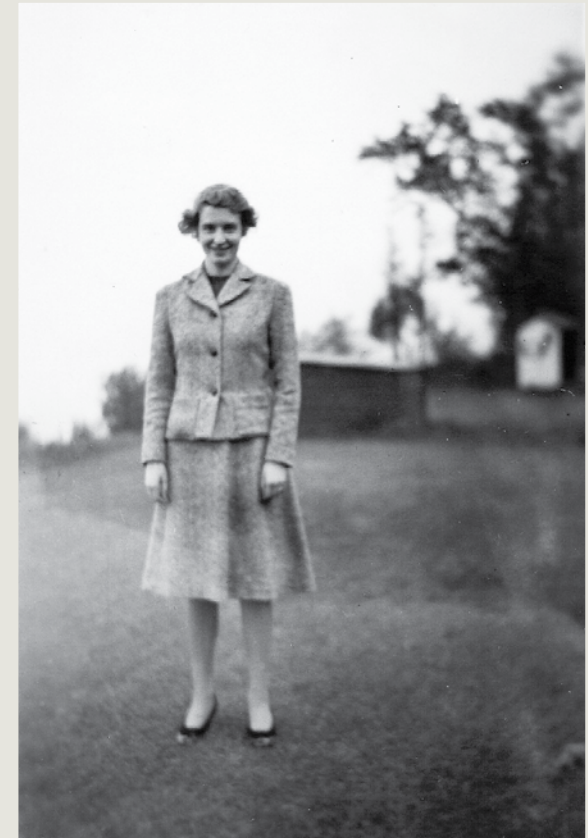


A Writing Life

RELEASE DATE (TO BE DETERMINED)

For more information: www.wordsindeed.ca



Selected Journalism of

MARY WILLAN MASON



biography

MARY WILLAN MASON, born 1920, grew up in North Toronto, daughter of English-born parents, composer and organist Healey Willan and pianist and singer Gladys ('Nell') Hall, who proved endlessly inspiring. Mary began acting on stage and attending concerts and ballet at about five, and a voyage at six to Britain stirred a love of travel. Soon Mary was making costumes for actors. After intense study in art, she matriculated at 15 from Britain's Royal Drawing Society. At University College, University of Toronto, 1939–43, she had a life-directing stint at the *Varsity* student newspaper.

In the 1950s, she was art, drama, and music critic at the *Hamilton Spectator*. She lived in the 1960s in Chicago (where she studied at the Art Institute of Chicago) and New York. Directing the Ontario Choral Federation 1975–83, she regularly prepared "Missives from Mary" for its newsletter. In later decades, Mary wrote for many publications, including the *Globe and Mail*, *Antiques Showcase*, and *Arias*. Her books are *The Consummate Canadian*, about art collector Samuel Weir, (1990); *The Well-Tempered Listener*; and *The Hivernante* (2015).

In her nineties, Mary visited, for *Catholic Insight* magazine, Italy, Poland, the Baltic states, Ethiopia, and Kurdistan. At 97, she took the Trans-Siberian Express from Moscow to Beijing, with a side trip to Mongolia.

"BRINGING UP MARY" (about *The Well-Tempered Listener*) **Published 2010**

MARY WILLAN MASON, NOW 103, grew up in a lively, music-saturated Toronto home. Her gifted musician parents, Healey Willan and Gladys ('Nell') Hall, facilitated and encouraged her budding interests in art, drama, and music — three major themes of her future journalism. Making outfits (by age ten) for Dora Mavor Moore's players introduced her to clothing and design. Travel — a transatlantic voyage at five — comes vividly to life in *The Well-Tempered Listener: Growing Up with Musical Parents* (Toronto:

Words Indeed, 2010), published when the author turned ninety. This memoir outlines her education, which started early, was at times informal, hands-on, ears-on, and applied. The remarkable woman it produced is still recognizable today.

Mary never enjoyed practising piano, and "when in the early 1930s drawing began to fascinate me and occupy my time, Dad told me that ... I should follow my instincts" (p. 5). At St Mildred's College, Mary began serious art study and matriculated at fifteen from Britain's Royal Drawing Society, with honours in all six subjects, thereby qualifying for London's prestigious Slade School of Fine Art.

In her final year at University College (1942–43), Mary would have a life-changing stint at the *Varsity* student newspaper. Everything that she had read, memorized, observed, heard, asked and chatted about, thought about, written about, declaimed in class and on stage, sketched and painted, repaired, made with her own hands would help her illuminate, ground, deeply inform, and nudge readers to envision, grasp, puzzle, query, chuckle, laugh, sometimes gasp, occasionally say "Ah! ..." during her eight decades of journalism.

career 1925 – 2017 — Some journalistic highlights

MARY PREPARED THREE COLUMNS a week at the *Hamilton Spectator*, as art, drama, and music critic in the 1950s. The newspaper's archives, in the Hamilton Public Library, did not, in autumn 2022, initially throw up any relevant material for this collection. A hunch that the Art Gallery of Hamilton might have saved some reviews paid off when a diligent archivist there uncovered half a dozen reviews of art at the gallery. ...

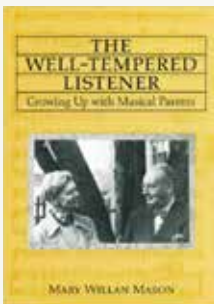
Commissions from *Catholic Insight* in the 2010s led Mary, in her nineties, on remarkable expeditions to Poland, the Baltic states, Ethiopia, and Kurdistan. Publisher John Parry recalls her preparing to go to northern Ethiopia, partway by camel, to explore ancient underground churches. When she returned, she praised the local people, who had very little yet shared whatever they had. Another trip, to newly liberated Kurdistan, led to a delightful chat with a gracious Muslim gentleman, fascinated by a woman venturing out unaccompanied. When John took Mary out for her 97th birthday, she was planning a 23-day excursion on the Trans-Siberian Express, via Mongolia. She reported on her return an extraordinary adventure.

from lunch to launch 2018 — Release date to be determined

AT TORONTO'S BISTRO CAMINO on the Danforth, on 30 November 2018, author Laurie Dennett addressed 'Camino' Pilgrims about *A Hug for the Apostle* (Words Indeed). At our table, during lunch beforehand, veteran journalist Mary Willan Mason chatted — we all listened avidly — with *Hug* designer Anne Vellone and journalism student Mitchell Consky. Mary answered Anne and Mitch's enthusiastic questions with verve and humour:

- She had joined the staff of University of Toronto's *Varsity* student newspaper in her final year at University College: 1942–43!
- Its reputation was legendary back then, even in U.S. newspaper circles.
- Colleagues at the *Hamilton Spectator* in the 1950s had included fast-talking, hard-bitten veteran reporters — real 'characters.'

This animated lunchtime chat sowed the seeds of this book.



foreword *(excerpts)*

MITCHELL CONSKY IS A TORONTO-BASED journalist and writer, author of the deeply moving *Home Safe: A Memoir of End-of-Life Care During Covid-19* (Dundurn, 2022).

I FIRST MET MARY AT A BOOK TALK for Laurie Dennett's *A Hug for the Apostle* in 2019, when she told us about her earliest days reporting for the *Varsity*, the University of Toronto's student newspaper, in 1942—43, her last year at University College. My career as a journalist also started at a student newspaper — namely, Wilfrid Laurier University's the *Cord* — and I was immediately drawn to her recountings of fact-checking her stories and sending them to the printing press — in a chemistry lab on campus. The collaborative and chaotic newsroom she described reminded me why I loved student journalism — a group of unpaid volunteers working together late into the nights, aiming to meet deadlines and craft something worth reading, seemed familiar and hopeful. Mary [with a rich musical background] later spoke to me about the cooperation and humility that emerge when musicians harmonize, reducing their egos to become part of something larger, and I think a similar dynamic would transform the *Varsity* newsroom all those years ago, as contributors collectively built something that required each member's part. (But bylines, I realize, guarantee some remnants of ego.) ...

As we sat in her living-room, Mary told me a story about a *Varsity* colleague who hitchhiked to New York and walked into the offices of the *New York Times*. This colleague, Mary told me, approached the managing editor of the *Times*, explaining that he was an undergraduate and an aspiring journalist. "He was hoping maybe he could be hired to distribute pencils or something," Mary recalled. When the editor asked him about his journalistic experience, he replied that he was on staff at U of T's *Varsity*. Mary said, "The editor of the *New York Times* told him he doesn't have to collect pencils. [He said], 'We'll take you on as a cub [a junior reporter].' So he was a cub all summer." This editor had already heard about the Canadian student newspaper that published five issues a week. According to Mary, the *Varsity* had garnered a reputation of delivering the best student journalism "on the continent."

book contents page *(in progress)*

GENESIS: TABLE TALK

FOREWORD by Mitchell Consky

BRINGING UP MARY: Art, Drama,
Music — Design and Travel

Part I: University College Years
(1939—1943)

Part II: Art

Part III: Antiques

Part IV: Music

Part V: Travel

Chronology

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selected curated articles

Published 2017

"Chagall and Music" at the Montreal
Musée des Beaux Arts from
Heliconian Club, Yearbook (2017).

BY MARY WILLAN MASON

What an inspiring pairing
— January 28 until June 14, 2017



Marc Chagall, (1887—1985). Above: Detail of a tapestry in the Marc Chagall Lounge in the Knesset, Israeli parliament building, Jerusalem. Below: A tapestry *Entrance into Jerusalem* commands one entire wall.

WE ARE TOLD THAT CHAGALL sang Mozart, his favourite composer, as he worked on "The Sources of Music" and "The Triumph of Music," two huge canvases for the Metropolitan Opera House in New York. Many a preparatory drawing and sketches for this and other commissions are on display. Costumes for his beloved "Magic Flute," also for the Met, are here for a close-up look. Chagall's works in every field of art reflect rhythm and love with or without a violin in view and are seemingly spontaneous. Here is where this exhibit reveals the truly creative genius of our era's most versatile artist in the privately owned sketches, yes, works in progress, from the "Fables of Fontaine," the ceiling of the Paris Opera, stained-glass designs for cathedrals, synagogues, the Hadassah Medical Centre in Jerusalem, on and on. Chagall left nothing to chance: A tapestry for the Knesset, "Entrance into Jerusalem," commands one entire wall, pottery and sculptures, privately owned paintings as well as a few well-known works leave one overwhelmed, so many works all brought to life by one individual over a lifetime of 98 years. Montreal has done itself proud indeed for the city's 375th birthday.



© PHOTOS: MARY WILLAN MASON

Rossetti's Wombat?

The owl, the wombat and the numbat of University College from *Canadian Collector* 21, no.2 (March 1986), 24—7

BY MARY WILLAN MASON

"I HOPE TO BE ABLE to get Millais and Rossetti to design flower and beast borders, crocodiles and various vermin and we will carve them about [the College] windows," wrote Frederic Cumberland to English physician Dr. Henry Acland in 1856.

Cumberland was about to set off for Europe and the British Isles to acquaint himself with the most up-to-date thinking on academic architecture. He had only just been appointed architect for the new University College by John Langton, who himself had just been appointed Vice-Chancellor of the University of Toronto.

The new Vice-Chancellor was a Cambridge graduate and an immigrant who had found farming in the Canadian bush not to his taste. He had been elected to represent pioneering neighbours from Peterborough in the Legislative Assembly and then was invited by John A. Macdonald to become the first Auditor General of Public Accounts. It was John Langton who described the casual behaviour of members of the Assembly as giving the place the air of a coffee house, and then he raised an uproar when he insisted that persons spending public monies provide receipts for same. A man, in short, of upright character and stern principles who was able to take care of himself under fire and to ensure that his visions for his new country come to fruition.

One of his visions was a great and noble building to house University College. He wanted the only non-sectarian degree granting institution to be the biggest, most up to date, grandest and most imposing college in Upper Canada. Then, he reasoned, all other colleges would be entitled to less of the allotment funds,



Pre-Raphaelite wombat adorns University College's west-wing windows

© PHOTOS: MARY WILLAN MASON

and might even find it advantageous to form a university of federated colleges similar to Oxford, with University College the acknowledged centrepiece.

Langton's choice of FW. Cumberland was a brilliant stroke. Fred Cumberland had arrived in Canada in 1847, aged 26, with his wife Wilmot Bramley. Wilmot's two sisters had each married a Ridout, and therefore were able to introduce the young Cumberlands into the socially prominent Family Compact circle. Fred Cumberland had been trained as an engineer, and it is thought had worked for Charles Barry in the design and construction of Westminster New Palace, more popularly known as the British Houses of Parliament, begun in 1840.

Fred Cumberland had, however, another claim to distinction. He was an old school friend of John Ruskin. Cumberland was 15 when Ruskin briefly sailed into King's College, a seasoned world traveller at 17. The two lads shared many enthusiasms, from a passionate addiction to "English earliest decorated" to "Venetian Gothic" in architecture to, in later life, the encouragement of educational opportunities for working men.

The design Fred Cumberland and John Langton submitted to Edmund Head, the Governor General of British North America and Official Visitor to the University of Toronto, bore a striking resemblance to Deane and Woodward's Gothic inspired and competition-winning design for the University Museum, Oxford.

Edmund Head turned it down forthwith. He was an amateur art critic, had written a book on the subject and had something more Palladian in mind, perhaps with a little Brighton Pavilion thrown in.

Cumberland and Langton groaned. Langton summed up his feelings: "The site being chosen Cumberland first drew a sketch of a Gothic building, but the Governor would not hear of Gothic and recommended Italian, shewing us an example of the style, a palazzo at Sienna which, if he were not Gov. Gen. and had written a book on art, I should have called one of the ugliest buildings I ever saw. However after a weeks absence the Gov. came back with a new idea. It was to be Byzantine; and between them they concocted a most hideous elevation. After the Gov. was absent on tour for several weeks, during which we polished away almost all traces of Byzantine and got a hybrid with some features of Norman, of early English etc, with faint traces of Byzantium and the Italian palazzo."

His Excellency approved the design but was known to change his mind at frequent intervals. What better way for Langton and Cumberland to be persuasive about their own ideas, than to call upon the most fashionable corroboration fresh from Britain?



Crocodile, fish and frog in corner of exterior, Croft Chapter House

© PHOTOS: MARY WILLAN MASON

What better way to be persuasive than to bring back designs executed by the fashionable young Pre-Raphaelites, Millais and Rossetti?

So off Fred Cumberland sailed in the early part of 1856 to see for himself, renew old friendships, and bring back the evidence. “English earliest decorated” was in, Scholastic Gothic was in. When he wrote to Dr. Acland about the possibility of Millais and Rossetti designing ornamentation, he may not have been aware this would offer awkward difficulties.

Ruskin had been one of the first to champion three of the PRBs (Pre-Raphaelite Brethren) — Millais, Rossetti and Hunt — in a letter to the *Times* in 1851, and he had subsequently defended Millais with lavish praise. Ruskin had wanted to make “another Turner” out of Millais and to dominate the younger man’s development. But by 1853 the relationship had altered dramatically. Millais took to sketching Effie Ruskin and encouraged her to sketch as well. The result was a scandal which rocked and shocked the primmer aspects of London society. The Ruskin marriage was “annulled,” leaving Effie and Millais free to sketch one another and by 1855 to marry. Ruskin maintained the most dignified and frigid of silences throughout the entire affair, but relieved his feelings by denouncing Millais’ paintings unmercifully.

In 1856, Millais was more engrossed in painting Effie than in designing crocodiles. As for Dante Gabriel Rossetti, he was living with a beautiful young girl, Elizabeth Siddal, a favourite model of the PRBs whom they nicknamed Guggums. Guggums had been a shop assistant, which so upset the Rossetti parents that they refused to attend their son’s wedding, even after eight years of informal domesticity.

Rossetti, lecturing somewhat intermittently at the Working Men’s College and enjoying the admiration of William Morris and Edward Burne-Jones, two newer members of the PRBs, was engaged in creating fanciful designs for his and Guggums’ lodging in London. All three men were engaged in working upon decorative designs for the new Oxford University Museum. Ruskin at the same time was acting as an amateur consultant to Deane and Woodward, architects of the Oxford University Museum. Rossetti, Morris and Burne-Jones were also engaged to design and paint frescoes for the Oxford Union, a series based on the legends of King Arthur. Unfortunately they had no idea of the preparation required and as fast as they painted directly on to the wet plaster, the paint peeled, sagged and fell off the walls.

It was during this rather challenging period of his life that Rossetti became interested in wombats. Wombats and other exotic beasts became one of his passions. From 1855 to about 1858 he could be said to be going through his early wombat period. After Guggums’ death in 1862, Rossetti became even more involved with wombats. He kept them in his lodgings along with owls, rabbits, dormice, woodchucks, kangaroos, wallabies, a raccoon and a jackass, as well as a Brahma bull, whose eyes reminded him, so he said, of Jane Morris, the wife of William Morris. Wombats are noted for their

burrowing habits and one is left wondering about the state of hygiene in Rossetti’s zoo-like home.

Fred Cumberland stepped from the respectability and decorum of the Family Compact and Toronto society, into this yeasty feisty society. Nevertheless when he returned to Toronto he was able to produce designs for the ornamentation of University College that harmonized with the thinking and the intentions of the PRBs and in many respects bear a great similarity to those done by Rossetti for the University Museum Oxford, including a small elegant stylized wombat.

At University College the little wombat enjoys the central position in a trio of sophisticated stylized beasts that adorn the midpoint of the three southern-facing sets of double windows on the west wing’s ground floor. The little wombat is flanked by an equally distinguished horned owl and what may easily pass for a numbat, a fellow native of Australia.

The crocodile that Fred Cumberland hoped for was placed together with two friends, a fish and a frog, in the abutment of the west wall and the northeastern corner of Croft Chapter House. The crocodile anticipates his next meal with joyous enthusiasm. His victim, the fish, in a beautiful S curve waves his fins in surrender to the inevitable. The frog is poised, ready to leap into space in a split second.

Croft Chapter House, named after Henry Holmes Croft, professor of chemistry and experimental philosophy, was added to the design for University College at the southwest corner of the building. Possibly Professor Croft’s experience at his first lecture back in 1842 had something to do with the decision to house the chemistry lab in an area of its own. Croft had managed to set Bishop Strachan’s lawn sleeve on fire by flying pieces of burning potassium. It is perhaps significant that in 1856 Professor Croft was on the staff of University College rather than Dr. Strachan’s Trinity College.

As stone carvers Cumberland retained the firm of Worthington Brothers, Stone

Masons of Albert Street. Over the Worthington Brothers’ signature on the contract we learn that “The carvings of the beasts shall be executed in artistic style, bold in relief, sharp, true and graceful in outline, that near the eye delicate in finish, but that in lofty position having boldness and depth of cut in simple forms.”

One would suppose that with Cumberland back in To-



Grotesque heads (portraits) of the masons (or their foremen?) executed by Worthington Brothers, Stone Masons of Albert Street, Toronto

© PHOTOS: MARY WILLAN MASON



© PHOTO: ANNE VELLONE

ronto, with the latest in Scholastic Gothic at his fingertips and perhaps the coveted designs of Rossetti and possibly Millais as well, all would be plain sailing.

Not a bit of it. Sir Edmund Head was still changing his mind. This time he wanted the design swung through ninety degrees. Everybody except Sir Edmund agreed the new plan was a “most hideous elevation.” Everyone on the planning committee resigned or disappeared, leaving John Langton and Fred Cumberland to carry out their dream in their own way. Fortunately Langton and Cumberland were in accord and since the President of the University was heartily disliked by all his staff members, Langton had their support. Sir Edmund was not invited to lay the cornerstone, even though he was Official Visitor. The plan had been swung back into its original orientation, but Sir Edmund was adamant about sparing a particular tree. Langton and Cumberland gritted their teeth and adjustments were made to the plan. When the building was virtually completed, Sir Edmund was invited to lay the coping stone on the top of the tower, on the theory that not much of importance could be changed after that. There was one little item, however. Sir Edmund’s ideas were that the lecture rooms should be gathering places where young minds were to be ignited, but apparently in a standing position. On designs for the lecture halls, submitted for his approval, seating arrangements were carefully rubbed out and then quietly reinstated.

As for the stylish serene wombat flanked by the horned owl and numbat, as well as the crocodile, the fish, the frog and a vast number of other creatures, they apparently were well and truly carved from a superior stone which so far has disdained to be washed away by modern pollution.

One can only hope that Fred Cumberland did indeed fulfill his promise to Dr. Acland to “drape” the college windows with designs by Rossetti and Millais.

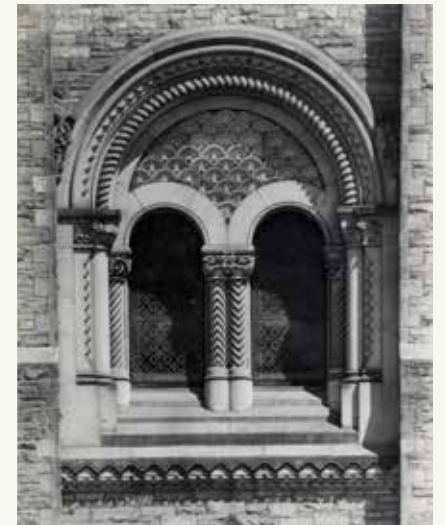


Photo at left: University College front entrance
Photo at right: window detail



WORDS INDEED PUBLISHING

JOHN PARRY SET UP WORDS INDEED to publish Mary Willan Mason's childhood memoir of north Toronto in the 1920s and 1930s. *The Well-Tempered Listener* (2010) won an Honourable Mention, Heritage Toronto Awards, 2011; Outstanding Choral Publication of 2012, Association of Canadian Choral Composers. Designer Anne Vellone of Vellone Design took Words Indeed to a new level when she harnessed 22 years of research and many images (150 of them her own) of charming, Victorian Huron-Sussex in central Toronto to create *Recollections of a Neighbourhood* (2013). Superb memoirs heightened by evocative photographs followed: Tony van Straubenzee's *Rind in the Marmalade: A Headhunter's Tales* (2016), Nora Lever's *Diplomacy and Friendship: Ambassador's Wife in Gulf War Riyadh* (2017), Laurie Dennett's *A Hug for the Apostle: On Foot from Chartres to Santiago de Compostela* (2019), and John Randle's *The Landlady Quintet* (2021). Tony Partington's *Hodden Grey: From Scottish Homespun to Modern Battledress* traced the story of hardy hodden back before the Roman soldiers on Hadrian's Wall and offered vivid photos of striped hodden produced by Celtic tribes in central Europe 3,200 years ago!

Words Indeed books generate spinoffs: inspired by the Rochdale chapter in *Recollections of a Neighbourhood*, journalist Mitchell Consky wrote half a book and a TV script on the experimental college. At a luncheon talk by Laurie Dennett (*A Hug for the Apostle*), his and designer Anne Vellone's questions for Mary Willan Mason about her eight decades in journalism led to Mary's latest, upcoming volume from Words Indeed, which Vellone Design is currently working on... Stay tuned.



A collection of Words Indeed award winning volumes