FLORIDA STATE UNIVERSITY

JEAN LEE LATHAM: A BIO-BIBLIOGRAPHY

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INTRODUCTION

In the past three decades reading material for young people has increased greatly in quantity, variety, availability, and quality. Especially significant has been this increase in the field of biography, a medium which not too many years ago had small circulation among juvenile readers because the format was unimaginative and the contents dull and boring.\(^1\) Such is no longer true. Biographies for young people today are stimulating and read like adventure stories. Their format is eye-catching and the titles are imaginative. They circulate as rapidly and continuously as does the ever-popular fiction for young people.

The flood of juvenile biographies in the past few years necessitates standards of evaluation for them. In the earlier period appropriate biographies were so few that librarians were obliged to take and be thankful for any that were published. Now, however, biographies of a great many individuals have been published for all grade and reading levels. Since these vary greatly in quality, librarians need help in selection. In order to determine which have merit it is helpful to consider what by definition biography

is. The Oxford English Dictionary defines it as "the history of the lives of individual men as a branch of literature."¹

According to Arbuthnot, there are three points of emphasis: "history, that is, facts authentic and verifiable; an individual, not a paragon or a type; literature, that is, a conscious work of art."²

This not only defines the form, but also suggests the standards by which to judge biographies. A biography must have authenticity, objectivity, and documentation; it must not develop a type but the whole man with vivid details, and it must have some conscious artistry—a subject, theme, unity, style, and pattern.³

Arbuthnot further divides biographies for young people into two types:

First, there is a fictionalized biography, in which the facts are documented and only a few liberties are taken, such as ... dialogue for which there is no actual record. Second, there is biographical fiction, which takes a historical character as a basis for a story semihistorical in nature.⁴

Examples of the first type are the fictionalized biographies of Jean Lee Latham. These books are based on the facts of careful research and are fictionalized only to the extent that the known facts are placed into dramatic scenes and furnish the characters with stimulating dialogue. In

²Arbuthnot, loc. cit., p. 472.
³Ibid., pp. 472-478.
⁴Ibid., p. 479.
less than seven years Miss Latham has "brought back alive" eight long-neglected and little-known men who made outstanding contributions to progress. These biographies are very popular with the teen-agers for whom she writes.

The purpose, then, of this study is to present a biographical account of Miss Latham, and, to determine her place in the field of children's literature on the basis of critical opinion of her biographies expressed in reviews and on the basis of their inclusion in authoritative book selection aids and on best seller lists.

Miss Latham was chosen as the subject of this paper, first, because of great admiration for her and her works and, secondly, because of her stature as an author of young people's biographies. Although she has been a prolific writer of drama, she is now best known for her contributions to young people's literature, and only this phase of her work is considered in this study. Only the eight fictionalized are included in this study of her contributions.

The material for this paper includes all of Miss Latham's books and all of the available articles written about her and her writings. Furthermore, in a six-hour personal interview Miss Latham provided much information not available in written sources. At the end of the interview Miss Latham offered the use of her personal scrapbook and her clipping files of reviews.

Additional biographical information was located through Biography Index, Library Literature, and Readers'
Guide to Periodical Literature. In preparing the sketch of her life, especially valuable were the Current Biography Yearbook, Who's Who in America, and Who's Who of American Women. The bibliographical information was located through the Cumulative Book Index, Children's Catalog, Logasa's Index to One-Act Plays for Stage and Radio. In addition to reviews of her books traced through the Book Review Digest, Miss Latham's clipping life and scrapbook, contained many other reviews not indexed and much original material not found in other sources.

The paper itself is organized into three chapters. The first chapter consists of data relative to her life and career. The second chapter gives a short summary of each book, in the order of publication, a synthesis of critical reaction to each, followed by other evidences of their success. The third is a brief summary of the findings in the first two chapters. This is followed by a bibliography containing a listing of Miss Latham's books, of her published plays, of bibliographic sources, and of general reference sources.
CHAPTER I

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Jean Lee Latham was born April 2, 1902, in Buckhannon, West Virginia, the second of four children of Winifred Ethelda (Brown) and George Robert Latham, II.¹ Her older sister, Juliet, now Mrs. John W. Matheny,² is a mathematics teacher in Miami, Florida; her younger brother, George Robert III, is a mechanical and electrical engineer; the youngest brother, Frank B., is copy chief of Look magazine.³

Both sides of Jean's family were prominent in the early history of West Virginia. Her grandfather, George Latham, was a newspaper publisher at Grafton, Virginia, (now West Virginia). He was a Union Colonel during the War Between the States, and, although after the war he was made Brigadier General, he preferred the title, Colonel, under which he fought.⁴

² Hillbilly (Morgantown, W. Va.), November 17, 1956, p. 9.
⁴ Hillbilly, loc. cit.
Mrs. Latham, Jean's mother, known as "Miss Winnie" to her friends, was a persistent and strong-willed little lady who "could do anything she determined to do." Miss Winnie suffered from a heart condition after a childhood illness, but she ignored the doctor's orders that she should not risk bearing a child. She gave birth to four strong energetic children and lived a long, full life.

Through Miss Winnie's understanding of children and her positive guidance, Jean developed a similar spirit of strong determination. Though, reared under a "hands-off" policy, the children had assigned household duties to perform, but were given freedom in the accomplishment of these tasks. For instance, if Jean were in a creative mood at dish-washing time, she was never nagged nor scolded by Miss Winnie. The dishes waited until Jean's play-writing urge had been satisfied. Miss Latham claims that she still keeps house that way.

At a very early age, even before she could write, Jean began spinning yarns. She wrote plays before she had learned to spell. One day before she was ten years old she

1 Ellen Fulton, "Jean Lee Latham," Horn Book, XXXII (August, 1956), 293.
2 Ibid.
3 Ibid.
4 Ibid., p. 294.
5 Interview with Miss Latham, May 30, 1959.
6 Ibid.
told her mother that she had written herself out. Her mother offered these comforting words: "I believe that happens to writers all the time, Jeanie. When it does, they just go live some more."¹ That is exactly what Jean has been doing ever since.

As proof of her story-telling ability and success at a very early age, Jean says:

I was lucky enough to have two brothers. I began spinning yarns long before I began writing. There was a very practical reason back of my first stories: I had to wash dishes. I found that if I told stories to my just-younger brother, George, he would dry the dishes. Sometimes, if the story was interesting enough, George would wash and dry the dishes, too, without noticing what he was doing.

But don't think I wasn't working!! You see, George was going to grow up to be an engineer. Did you ever try to keep a budding engineer interested in a story? It's excellent training. I learned very young not to get enthralled with my vocabulary. George was strictly a what-happened type listener. I could either tell a good story or I could do my own dishes.²

The proof that Jean recovered from the barren period of her early childhood is that at the age of fourteen her "Evening of Plays" was presented at the Buckhannon High School. During her high school years Jean was not content just to write plays, but she also acted in them.³

³Gloria Biggs, "Jeannie Is 'Stabbed Awake' With Various Experiences," The St. Petersburg ( Fla.) Independent, September 16, 1953. (A clipping from Miss Latham's scrapbook, henceforth referred to as Latham's scrapbook.)
After attending public schools in Buckhannon and Elkin, West Virginia, Miss Latham did undergraduate work at West Virginia Wesleyan College in Buckhannon. Never satisfied with doing one thing at a time, during her last two years as an undergraduate Jean operated a linotype machine for the Buckhannon Delta.

After receiving a Bachelor of Arts degree in 1926, Miss Latham taught two years in the Upshur County High School. During the summer of the second year she was a substitute teacher at Wesleyan College. Not only did she teach at the high school and college, but during this time Jean took postgraduate courses at Wesleyan College.

During these busy college and teaching years Jean wrote many plays for the college dramatic club. Also she indulged in writing poetry filled with "beautiful purple passages." These plays and poems were taken very seriously by the members of the college literary clubs. At this time Jean almost forgot her earlier training as a story-teller under the budding engineer, and basking in the praise and

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1Cosgrave, loc. cit.

2Frank Heaster, "State Author Has Gained Honors For Children's Books," The Morgantown (W. Va.) Post, October 25, 1956, p. 1. (Latham's scrapbook.)

3Virginia Gazette (Williamsburg, Va.), November 2, 1956, p. 24. (Latham's scrapbook.)

4Fulton, loc. cit., p. 295.

5Interview with Miss Latham, May 30, 1959.

6Ibid.
approval of the college students, she overdid the use of vocabulary.¹ She remembers,

During vacation, one of that admiring group surprised me with a visit. She drove into town, found my neighborhood, and asked directions of a gang of boys playing sandlot baseball.

"Do you know where Jean Lee Latham lives?" She admitted later she probably said it in hushed tones.

One grubby little fellow answered, "That's Frank Latham's sister." He pointed with his thumb. "Her house is right over there, by Frank's pup tent."

Since the college days of purple-passage writing, Miss Latham has toned down her hyperbolic expression, and her books are free from overemphasis and excess verbiage. After her brother grew up, she had nephews and friends with sons who helped keep her feet on the floor.³

After completing her undergraduate work, she continued her education at Ithaca Conservatory (now Ithaca College). There she taught drama while she worked toward a degree in drama, and continued to find time to write plays and poetry. In 1928 she received the degree of Bachelor of Oral English from Ithaca Conservatory and began work on a Master of Arts at Cornell University. While pursuing this program of study Miss Latham, continued to teach at the Ithaca Conservatory.⁴

In 1930, Miss Latham received her master's degree and went to Chicago to work as Editor-in-Chief of the Dramatic

²Ibid.
³Ibid.
⁴Fulton, loc. cit.
Publishing Company. During the next six years it was her job to read and edit hundreds of plays, picking ten plays for publication each year.\(^1\) When she was unable to find the type of manuscript the company wanted, Miss Latham sat down and wrote one.\(^2\)

At the end of six years, as Miss Latham puts it, she "stopped working and started merely writing."\(^3\) Thus, having finished two careers, namely teaching and editing, she began her third, free-lance writing. During this period she spent much time writing stage plays for the amateur market, schools, colleges and little theaters. Her plays were published by the Dramatic Publishing Company, Row Peterson, and the Dramatic Play Service of the Authors' League.\(^4\) Miss Latham also did radio shows for "First Nighter," "Skippy Hollywood Theater," "Grand Central Station," and various other half-hour programs.\(^5\)

During these years before the war, Miss Latham found time between writing plays and radio shows to write

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\(^2\) Ibid.

\(^3\) Cecelia Fickling, "Writer Follows 'Something New' Rule as Warm Springs Librarian," St. Petersburg Independent, August 8, 1951. (Latham's scrapbook.)

\(^4\) Jean Lee Latham, "From First Idea to Footlights," Cameo, XIX (November, 1951).

\(^5\) Fickling, loc. cit.
promotion publicity and recruitment of local community concert associations through West Virginia, Virginia, and Kentucky. In connection with these she also did radio shows and publicity for the Edwin Strawbridge Ballet, Westminster Choir and other name shows.  

During 1940 and 1941 she wrote a series of very short, short stories for radio presentation. 2 One of Miss Latham's most significant plays, published in 1940, was Old Doc, a play in three acts about an old couple who became Miss Latham's favorite characters over the years. They appeared first in a one-act play, The Blue Teapot, which is still being staged, and again in Dearly Beloved, completed in 1951. Kraft Television Theatre produced Old Doc on August 8, 1951. 3

Another successful venture was a radio show of 140 episodes on the Lewis and Clark Expeditions, composed as a juvenile historical program. 4 She spent six months in research on the matter of plains, Indians, geography and history, and turned out an especially successful long-run radio serial. 5 In gaining background for it Miss Latham employed the techniques of research that she was going to use later in her fictionalized biographies. In fact, actual material gathered for this series was used in writing one of her

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1 St. Petersburg (Fla.) Times, September 11, 1955, p. 130.
2 Interview with Miss Latham, May 30, 1959.
3 Fickling, loc. cit.
5 Ibid.
biographies at a later date.¹

Of the many plays written by Miss Latham in the past few years the most significant, still in print and frequently produced on the stage are: The Blue Teapot (1930), Old Doc (1940), Gray Bread (1941), and Señor Freedom (1941).² A book of pointers on plays for beginning actors and directors, first published in 1930 under the title Plays and Entertainments, and in 1931 under the title Plays was expanded and revised with new matter added in 1935.³ It is still in print and very popular today under the title, Do's and Don't's of Drama.⁴

Never satisfied to stay in one place very long at the time and always interested in trying something new, Miss Latham made a complete switch in 1942. Heeding the nation's call for civilian workers in National Defense,⁵ she went back to school to study electronics at West Virginia Institute of Technology.⁶ "This, by the way, was one time in my life," Miss Latham recalls, "I didn't do two things at a time! I ate, slept, and studied electronics."⁷

¹Ibid.
²Cosgrave, loc. cit., p. 739.
³Jean Lee Latham, Do's and Don't's of Drama (Chicago: The Dramatic Publishing Co., 1935), verso of the title page.
⁴Interview with Miss Latham, May 30, 1959.
⁵Fulton, loc. cit., p. 296.
⁶Ibid.
⁷Cosgrave, loc. cit.
Upon completion of her training Miss Latham was assigned to Signal Corps Inspection at the Crosley Plant, Cincinnati, where she wrote inspection procedures on pieces of equipment.\(^1\) By the end of the year she was called to the National Headquarters of the Signal Corps Inspection Agency at Dayton, Ohio.\(^2\) Once again she was happy to be doing two things instead of one. She was put in charge of the training program of Signal Corps Inspectors in the Newark, New Jersey, region, and given the job of writing and supervising the course for the advance training of women inspectors. The course which she wrote was used at the Illinois Institute of Technology, Chicago and at Temple University, Philadelphia.\(^3\) Miss Latham said, "This was my first experience with non-literati and I had a wonderful time because nobody knew I was a writer."\(^4\)

No small assignment was this. The Signal Corps Inspection jumped from 90 men in peacetime to a personnel of 6,000.\(^5\) Miss Latham conducted courses in the far-separated centers by commuting between Dayton, Chicago, Philadelphia, New York and Newark.\(^6\)

\(^1\) Fulton, loc. cit.
\(^2\) Ibid.
\(^3\) Ibid.
\(^4\) Nancy Osgood, "Noted Author Is 'Jeannie With the Light White Hair,'" St. Petersburg (Fla.) Times, May 4, 1958, p. 5-E.
\(^5\) Fulton, loc. cit.
\(^6\) Ibid.
She relates an amusing incident of her war experiences:

Men were usually skeptical about women technicians, and there were many times the big-shot engineers questioned me about my training. I would say that I obtained my master's at Cornell. The listeners would be properly impressed; remark about how unusual it is for a woman to be in this field, but to get a degree from such a tough school as Cornell, that's the 'most,' they would say. They never realized that my degree was in modern poetry, not engineering.¹

For her excellent service to the country during World War II, Miss Latham "was decorated with one of the War Department's highest honors and awards, the Silver Wreath."²

In 1945 Miss Latham resigned from the Inspection Corps. In accordance with her philosophy of "never double on the trail,"³ she marked a map with all the places that she had been and discovered that Florida was unmarked. Having decided to try St. Petersburg, she established herself at the Sunshine City Trailer Park in a specially-built trailer lined with reference books. At a built-in desk she "sat like a spider" in the middle so that she could reach whatever she needed.⁴

After she had assured herself of privacy and a climate suitable for writing, being gregarious by nature, she made friends among her neighbors and the community at large.

¹Interview with Miss Latham, May 30, 1959.
²Fickling, loc. cit.
³Interview with Miss Latham, May 30, 1959.
⁴Osgood, loc. cit.
She had installed a telephone with an unlisted number and a cut-off switch\(^1\) in order to insure solitude, and she taught her friends and neighbors to understand and respect her need for times of quietude for work.\(^2\) After-hours she relished companionship and engaged in many varied community activities and services. She conducted seminars on "You As a Writer of Fiction" and taught a course in creative writing at Craft Village, St. Petersburg.\(^3\) In 1949, Miss Latham became public information director of the St. Petersburg Red Cross,\(^4\) her first publicity assignment since before the war,\(^5\) and served as a Red Cross Gray Lady at the Veteran's Hospital in nearby Bay Pines. Following her experience as Gray Lady, she went on a tour of duty as librarian at the Warm Springs, Georgia, Library.\(^6\)

During the years as a Gray Lady at the Veteran's Hospital Miss Latham had the gratifying experience of working with the aphasics. Not only did she do speech retraining and testing of aphasics\(^7\) but she worked with diagnostic testing in the neuro-psychiatric ward, which she found absorbing and

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\(^1\) Fulton, loc. cit.
\(^2\) Ibid.
\(^3\) Fulton, loc. cit., p. 295.
\(^4\) St. Petersburg Times, September 11, 1955, p. 130.
\(^5\) Ibid.
\(^6\) Fickling, loc. cit.
\(^7\) Ibid.
entirely different from anything that she had ever done.¹ For thirteen months she worked very closely with them and with the psychiatrists.

She enjoyed this work of developing a new method of analysis, gaining the confidence of the patients, talking them into doing the finger painting, analyzing their work, making code analysis cards on each and consulting with the doctors on the findings. The method at that time was new and untested, and the head of the Psychiatric Department at Bay Pines told her that she could get a doctorate in psychology for the work she had done in pioneering the finger-painting psychoanalysis process.² She concluded, however, since she "lacked the proper titles" in psychology she would not care to return to school for formal background in psychology in order to acquire these titles.³

The years of community activity in St. Petersburg were not permitted to interrupt seriously her writing. Early in the new surroundings Miss Latham began exploring a new field, narrative writing.⁴ Her first efforts along this line were a series of short stories about the turning points of history over a hundred-year period. These were written in the fall of 1945 and winter of 1946, for Junior Scholastic

¹Ibid.
²Interview with Miss Latham, May 30, 1959.
³Ibid.
⁴Fuller, loc. cit.
magazine, then called *World Week*. Not only was this the beginning of her fourth career, the one that would be her forte, but was once again proof that she accomplished more when doing two things at a time. Her devotion to writing and her faithful services to the community kept Miss Latham very busy, but her literary achievements during this period were noteworthy.

In 1951, the Tampa Regional Mental Hygiene Society presented *The Iceberg*, an unpublished play written by Miss Latham. This three-act play sketches the dramatic results of too much mother love on a boy. It is a psychological play about what Miss Latham termed "smother love," with treatment too adult for any publisher to risk publishing it. Even though *The Iceberg* was too bold for the publisher, another drama, *The Nightmare*, was accepted for publication at this time. This, too, a psychological suspense drama in three acts is still being produced.

In December 1951, Miss Latham turned full-scale attention on a medium that was to give her a permanent place in literature, that is, fictionalized biography for young people. By September 1952, she had written two such biographies,

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1. Interview with Miss Latham, May 30, 1959.
2. *Charleston Gazette*, October 7, 1956. (Latham's scrapbook.)
3. *St. Petersburg Times*, 1951. (Latham's scrapbook.)

In writing her first biography, Miss Latham was not alone. Two young friends were excellent critics and a help to her.\(^1\) Michael ("Yanni") O'Mara, a nine-year-old neighbor boy, and Connie Anderson, ten years old, were younger than the reader the book was intended for, but they both read in advance of their years.\(^2\) Miss Latham's biggest problem with Whitney was to project it for the child's view of Whitney in his own day.\(^3\) Her experience as a dramatist made her seek an audience approval of the rough draft.\(^4\) As she herself recalls:

> So, I deliberately and scientifically set about getting a boy's-eye view. Yanni O'Mara, with his scientific bent of mind, was just my boy. The fact that we were good friends helped, and I could see which of and how the events of the late 1700s and early 1800s would affect him.\(^5\)

She read the manuscript to both the children. They liked it, but she wanted to know the truth, so she told them that one-third had to be cut and asked what they thought should come

\(^1\) Interview with Miss Latham, May 30, 1959.


\(^3\) *St. Petersburg Independent*, August 25, 1953.

(Latham's scrapbook.)

\(^4\) Ibid.

\(^5\) Ibid.
"With complete accord, the two picked out every "flashback" in the book. 'This is happening NOW, so we don't have to go back to what was happening THEN,' they told her." As a playwright Miss Latham accepted her audience reaction and rewrote the whole book leaving out every flashback. She has never used the flashback technique in any of her other books.

From the material she gathered for *The Story of Eli Whitney* she wrote a play, *The Ghost of Hiram Wedge*. This fantasy based on the life of Eli Whitney won second prize in the national play competition, the twelfth annual contest of Seattle Junior Programs, Incorporated, of Seattle, Washington.

For Miss Latham this was just the beginning of awards, honors, travel, research, and writing of biographies for young people. The research for the next book, *Carry On, Mr. Bowditch*, took her to Bowditch's native Salem, to Boston, and to Marblehead where she read Bowditch's own writings, including logs of his five ocean voyages, and diaries of his navigator contemporaries.

In preparing the book, she did not rely only upon

1. Interview with Miss Latham, May 30, 1959.
3. Ibid.
5. *St. Petersburg Times*, May 15, 1955, p. 3D.
research on the man and his period; she started from scratch to learn mathematics, astronomy, and sailing. From the junior high school level she worked up to advanced mathematics, nautical astronomy and sailing.¹

Since her previous "nautical experience consisted of two canoe rides and one trip on a ferryboat across the Chesapeake Bay ..."² she obtained practical experience through a course given by the U. S. Power Squadron in elementary piloting and small boat handling.³

Building up her academic background in this field was even more difficult. According to her own statement:

I knew I was going to spend a long time on background. I did. . . . I had to start at junior-high level with books like How To Have Fun With Arithmetic and A Boy's First Book of the Stars and work up to celestial navigation.

Navigation was just one part of it; background is a way of life; I had to know how people lived, what happened to them, and, most important of all, how they felt about what happened.

When I had finished my research my notes would have filled ten books the size of Carry On, Mr. Bowditch.⁴

After many hours of research and dictation of her notes on a tape-recorder, the problem of space for all the reference data became acute. Miss Latham had two doors in her trailer, and the climax of overcrowding was reached when

¹ Fuller, loc. cit.


³ Fulton, loc. cit., p. 295.

something came in one door as something else had to go out the other. As a consequence she found herself disposing of reference books and materials that she needed. In 1955, the trailer, long since dubbed S.R.O., had reached the point that, when her books took even the standing room, she felt obliged to have more space. In the fall of that year she found an apartment and with some reluctance left her trailer workshop where she had managed to write the first five books to bring her international recognition.

All of this hard work was a source of delight for Miss Latham. She is always more interested in what is happening to the book while she builds it than in what happens after it goes to the publisher. As proof of that,

Jean Latham's books have won many awards; but no recognition, no honor can compare with the pleasure of getting a job done. When the telegram came with the news that "Carry On, Mr. Bowditch" had won the 1955 Newberry [sic] award, she checked the encyclopedia to see precisely what she had won; then she returned to her typewriter and wrote until 2 o'clock the following morning, drank a glass of beer, and went to sleep.

She did however, take time out on June 19, 1956, to go to the Pompeian Room at the Eden Roc Hotel, Miami Beach, Florida, to receive the Nation's top award for children's

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1 Interview, May 30, 1959.
2 Fuller, loc. cit.
3 Osgood, loc. cit.
5 Fred Shaw, "Wanting to be a Writer," Miami News, April 13, 1958. (Latham's scrapbook.)
books,\(^1\) the John Newbery Medal for her book, *Carry On, Mr. Bowditch*. This book was considered the most distinguished contribution in 1955, in American literature for children, by a committee of twenty-three librarians from the Children's Library Association, a division of the American Library Association.\(^2\)

*Carry On, Mr. Bowditch* brought other honors. It received honorable mention from The International Board on Books for Young People in competition for the Hans Christian Andersen Medal.\(^3\) It was translated into five languages: Arabic, Chinese, Korean, Marathi, and Serbo-Croatian,\(^4\) whereas her second book *Medals For Morse* was translated only into one --German.

As pleased as Miss Latham was with these honors, she was happiest about being invited by the Library of Congress to record the book as a talking book for the blind and to be allowed to record it herself on ten double-faced long playing records.\(^5\)

Since receiving the Newbery Award Miss Latham has lectured in cities all over the United States and abroad. She has also been "first" in a number of things. "For the

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\(^1\) *Miami Herald*, June 20, 1956, p. 21.


\(^4\) *Interview with Miss Latham, May 30, 1959.*

first time in its history, the City of St. Petersburg gave a luncheon ... in honor of a local author who has achieved nation-wide fame."¹ She was guest speaker at the first book fair ever to be held West of the Rockies,² and principal speaker for Hawaii's first book fair at the Honolulu Academy of Arts.³ Miss Latham went to Hawaii to make three speeches at the book fair, and while there made forty-four for the library associations and for schools of the Islands. In fact, Miss Latham toured every island, spoke to the children and the adults, and left them feeling "she is a warm, friendly person who makes you feel as though they were life-long friends even at a first meeting."⁴

In the spring of 1956 Miss Latham moved from St. Petersburg to Miami, where she would find more research possibilities and more recreational diversions when she wanted to come up for air.⁵ Here Miss Latham settled in a roomy efficiency apartment in a quiet neighborhood. Her files, desk, and books are the center of the living area. The University of Miami Library and the Miami Public Library have abundant materials for her research and their staffs are well

¹St. Petersburg Independent, March 29, 1956.
²Honolulu Star Bulletin, November 15, 1956. (Latham's scrapbook.)
³Ibid.
⁵Interview with Miss Latham, May 30, 1959.
equipped to assist. In Miami, too, she is near to intimate friends and literary associates who reside at Nassau, and there she finds many friends to share her interest in boating, her present hobby.

Before Miss Latham moved to Miami she had written five books for young people. In 1954, after the publication of Carry On, Mr. Bowditch, she began work on Trail Blazer of the Seas, a biography about Matthew Fontaine Maury. Research took her to Norfolk, and Williamsburg, Virginia, where she gathered her material at the library of the college of William and Mary and at the Mariner's Museum in New Port News, Virginia. At this time she also did research for her next book, which was released in time for the 350th anniversary of the founding of Jamestown. This Dear-bought Land tells the story of Captain John Smith's leadership there. One of four books about Jamestown to be released for young people for this anniversary celebration, it was instrumental in her being selected as a guest speaker at the big anniversary celebration. The critics were lavish in their praises of this book. The New York Herald Tribune reviewer said, "It is by far the best of the four."

1Ibid.
3The Virginia Gazette, loc. cit.
4New York Herald Tribune Book Review, May 12, 1957,
Miss Latham has said that *This Dear-bought Land* took her "ten months and twenty years" to write. The twenty years refers to the time when she did research for an early American radio series and ran across some of John Smith's writings. His expression, "this dear-bought land? stuck in her head and she said at the time, "He's my cookie; someday I'll write about him."¹ But not until in 1956 was the book written and not until 1957 was it published.

Before 1958 was over Miss Latham had two more biographies for young people on the market, *On Stage, Mr. Jefferson!* and *Young Man in a Hurry*. The first is the story of the early American theater and of the famous actor Joseph Jefferson III. After the book was published Miss Latham received a letter of praise from Eleanor Farjeon, granddaughter of Joseph Jefferson and author of children's books.² Miss Farjeon's cousin, Frank Jefferson, also expressed approval of the treatment of his forebear, stating:

> You have done a fine job, and given a true picture of my grandfather, grandmother. You must have done extensive research, and have painted a picture not only of the Jeffersons but of the time in which they traveled the country. . . .³

The second book, *Young Man In a Hurry*, a biography of Cyrus W. Field, who laid the Atlantic cable, came out in the fall

¹*Sarasota Herald Tribune*, March 10, 1957. (Latham's scrapbook.)

²Osgood, *loc. cit.*

³Letter from Mr. Frank Jefferson to Miss Latham, May 23, 1958. (Latham's scrapbook.)
of the same year.

Miss Latham says, "My aim is to do something different each year."¹ She does not care about having two books published the same year, but, since she gathers the material for several books simultaneously, spacing is not indicative of time spent on them. She has done the preliminary work on about four things yet unpublished.² She finished writing her eighth book about Sir Francis Drake last fall and it was published in the spring of 1960. She does not mind the hard work of research, and "being thought dumb"³ never deters her from "tackling" something about which she knows nothing. "This very fact makes the subject fascinating to me, too,"⁴ she says.

Miss Latham is asked frequently why she chose to write about inventors, scientists, or human calculating machines. Her blue eyes dance and sparkle as she says, "They chose me!"⁵ But for her interest in such men she gives partial credit to her engineer brother, George, who agrees with her contention that scientists and mathematicians are people that need to be so treated in the literature read by young people.⁶

¹Osgood, loc. cit.
²Interview with Miss Latham, May 30, 1959.
³Osgood, loc. cit.
⁴Ibid.
⁵Cosgrave, loc. cit., p. 739.
⁶Interview with Miss Latham, May 30, 1959.
Miss Latham has the ability to sift the volumes of technical material and to put it into laymen's language that young people can understand. The gift of "fleshing the bones"\(^1\) of her characters is a result of her former career as a playwright. To her books she brings her many and varied experiences. The wit and cunning of her lively phraseology comes naturally to her and is found in her books. She told of an incident that she considered the kindest thing that was ever said about her vocabulary. It happened at a lunch with a friend who had adopted two German children. Miss Latham said:

They learned to speak English very well, ... but everytime I said anything they would look to my friend for an explanation. Finally she said to me 'I never before realized how bracily idiomatic your vocabulary is.'\(^2\)

When asked if she would write adult biographies, Miss Latham said that she did not think so. She explained that the only difference between her books and those written for adults, "is that they're not so hipped and busted."\(^3\)

Miss Latham says that her books are primarily slanted to the adolescent boy, but, if girls read them, that is so much velvet.\(^4\) Her books have been a tremendous success.

When asked why she switched to writing fictionized biographies

\(^2\) Osgood, loc. cit.
\(^3\) Interview with Miss Latham, May 30, 1959.
\(^4\) Osgood, loc. cit.
for young people, she said, "because she was asked to do the first one" and ". . . I write for teen-agers because I'm very much like them. They're robustious and have a strong love for life. I like their out-sized dreams and hopes. . . ." 2

In choosing her subject Miss Latham said that she has three requirements for a dramatic story: significance, struggle, and suspense. 3 Before she chooses a character, his life must offer enough struggle to make an interesting story, suspense-wise. Then she builds the story to "bring him back alive." 4

Miss Latham builds her books instead of writing them. She builds her books in scenes, just as she wrote her plays. On blocked pages, she works out an incident plot of what happened and from it develops a scene plot in terms of people. . . . Then [she] begins discarding, developing or telescoping as the writing progresses. 5

She believes in absolute accuracy as the very first requisite, and after at least six months of research she "writes in white heat, then revises in cold blood." 6 She likes being a free-lance writer because "I do exactly what I want about the

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1 Interview with Miss Latham, May 30, 1959.
2 Honolulu Star Bulletin, November 11, 1956. (Latham's scrapbook.)
3 Interview with Miss Latham, May 30, 1959.
4 Fuller, loc. cit.
5 Osgood, loc. cit.
6 Interview with Miss Latham, May 30, 1959.
guys I want to do and I don't consider the research involved
as work."¹ She is an advocate of tight writing and says that
she spends more time cutting her work than writing it.²

In addition to the Silver Wreath awarded by the War
Department,³ over the years Miss Latham has received many
honors, including election to Phi Kappa Phi (Cornell Univer-
sity), to Zeta Phi Eta (Northwestern University), to the Delta
Kappa Gamma Society (National Honor Society for Women Educa-
tors), and the honorary degree Doctor of Letters (West
Virginia Wesleyan College).⁴ These distinguished honors,
while appreciated, are considered nonessentials in Miss
Latham's way of life.

Miss Latham seeks not only solitude for writing and
researching, but also a time for relaxation, friends, and fun.
In her spare time she enjoys biking, boating, swimming, danc-
ing, walking, and horseback riding.⁵ Cooking is one of her
favorite hobbies. "She is very proud of this art and will
talk readily about her favorite recipes."⁶ Also, she enjoys

¹Ibid.
²Eleanor Ostergaard, "Jean Lee Latham Tells How An
Author Builds a Book," Miami Herald, May 9, 1957. (Latham's
scrapbook.)
³Fulton, loc. cit., p. 296.
⁴Quentin R. Howard, "Versatile West Virginian Is Too
Busy To Be Bored," The Herald-Advertiser, April 7, 1957.
(Latham's scrapbook.)
⁵Fuller, loc. cit.
⁶Moore, loc. cit.
traveling and meeting new people.

In her own colorful words Miss Latham describes herself as, "five-foot-two when I stretch and add a bow tie." This tiny but dynamic, energetic lady whose deep and commanding voice belies her petite appearance loves life and is never bored. Her snow-white, curly, short hair give the lie to her youth and zest for life. She has a warm, friendly, outgoing personality and is most generous with her time. She is always helping people and encouraging and entertaining her friends. She dearly loves children and has many young friends.

Always on the go and never tiring, Miss Latham says: "I have more fun than people." Typical is her itinerary during the past summer and fall. In the summer she conducted a writers' workshop at Indiana University. Before returning to Miami, she stopped at St. Petersburg, Florida, to give two television shows and lectures. While in St. Petersburg she decided "to double on the trail" and returned to Hawaii. There she spent the fall, combining vacation with work by doing research, giving lectures, and helping set-up the second Book Fair. She actually went back to Miami just before

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1 Interview with Miss Latham, May 30, 1959.
2 Fuller, loc. cit.
3 Pickling, loc. cit.
4 Letter from Miss Latham, July 1, 1959.
5 Ibid.
6 Letter from Miss Latham, June 20, 1960.
Christmas. Miss Latham again plans to "double on the trail." She will again conduct the Indiana University Writers' conference, July 6 through July 12, 1960.¹ She is working on a "package deal" for a publisher, but at this time is not at liberty to divulge any information about it.² She has not found another man about whom she wants to write; but she is still looking for one with enough material extant about him to make research possible and a good book a certainty.³

Her drive and energy she credits to the stimulation given her by her association with young people. They both stimulate her physically and challenge her mentally. In commenting on this challenge she has stated:

Some people who are familiar with my adult radio plays ask me if I don't find it a bore to write for children. No. There is nothing boring about writing for the adolescent when you believe he knows more, and feels more, and understands more, than some grownups realize.⁴

¹Ibid. ²Ibid. ³Ibid. ⁴Ibid.

CHAPTER II

BOOKS OF JEAN LEE LATHAM

Between 1953 and 1960, Jean Lee Latham has written eight books for young people. These books, all fictionalized biographies, deal for the most part with men little known to the layman except for brief mention in history books—Eli Whitney, Samuel F. B. Morse, Nathaniel Bowditch, Matthew Fontaine Maury, John Smith, Joseph Jefferson, Cyrus W. Field and Francis Drake—but men who made lasting contributions to world history.

Feeling that an understanding of their contributions are a part of the American heritage, Miss Latham has taken these men from the obscurity of single sentences in history and has fleshed their bones with reality by the use of dramatic dialogue.\(^1\)

To qualify for such treatment the lives of such men must offer "enough struggle to make an interesting story—suspense wise,"\(^2\) and they must be personally challenging to the author. As Miss Latham stated this requirement in her own racy idiom: "Unless they burn a hole in my head and I

\(^1\) Latham, "Newbery Acceptance Speech," loc. cit., p. 286.

\(^2\) Fuller, loc. cit.
love them to pieces; I cannot write about them.¹

These books will be discussed here in chronological order. The theme of each will be followed by a synthesis of critical opinion and by such other evidences of recognition as exist.

The Story of Eli Whitney

The Story of Eli Whitney, Miss Latham's first biography for young people, was published by Aladdin Books in 1953 as one of the American Heritage Series. The illustrative sketches, the end papers and dust jacket all done by Fritz Kredel were termed distinguished.²

The hardships and struggles that a courageous and persistent young inventor encountered on a long road of discouragement to final success is the theme of this book.

The story begins in 1775 when a nine-year-old boy's dreams are interrupted by a friend on his way to fight in the American Revolution. Unfortunately the friend, Hiram Wedge, is detained because of a broken hammer on his home made musket, an incident that forges new dreams for Eli, who was later to develop the first assembly line for mass production of interchangeable parts for muskets.

Eli Whitney was encouraged by his loyal friends, Thomas Jefferson and Catherine Greene, to make full use of

¹Interview with Miss Latham, May 30, 1959.
his natural genius and to become a career inventor. Success, however, did not come swiftly or easily. Patent delays, the yellow fever epidemic, the theft of his first cotton gin, lawsuits, and a factory fire were his antagonists. Yet he had the stamina, the vision, the perseverance to win, and in his victory is inspiration for all who read The Story of Eli Whitney.

This book, Miss Latham's first for juveniles, was not as widely reviewed as were her later books. The reviews were in agreement that the story was well told in excellent style with strong characterization.

In general the reviews termed it a welcome addition to the biography shelves for young people since it would give them a broad understanding of and love for American history. Also some of the critics noted that, while the book was designed for young people, adults would also enjoy it.

Sylvester Vigilante, head of the American History Room at the New York Public Library, commented, "Jean Lee Latham is to be congratulated on this vivid portrait of a long-neglected American genius." Also, the reviewer for the New York Herald Tribune Book Review found this book to be a welcome addition in biography for this age group. Also, the Tribune

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1 St. Petersburg Independent, September 14, 1953. (Latham's scrapbook.)
2 Ibid.
considered "the historical background . . . well done."\(^1\)

In the **Library Journal** Harriet Morrison reported that a seventh-grader found the characterization to be good. The child had said: "It is hard to believe that I didn't know all the characters, for they seemed so real."\(^2\) Harriet Morrison continued,

> Good sound ethics, strong characterization, excellent style, and good format combine to make an outstanding biography and fascinating story. Recommended for background material for character-building, and as a good story. . . . \(^3\)

Cecelia Fickling, critic for the **St. Petersburg Independent**, agreed with others as to the story's historical value and good characterization. To her the story, "simply and beautifully told, is as alive and as packed with dynamic personality as is the author herself."\(^4\) Concurring with other reviewers in the opinion that this book would be interesting reading for and could be enjoyed by adults even though it is a fictionalized biography for young people, Fickling stated, "The special magic wrought by Miss Latham lies in the fact that, although this fictionalized biography was written for juveniles, it is equally as interesting to adults."\(^5\)

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\(^1\)**Ibid.**

\(^2\)**Library Journal**, LXXVII (December 15, 1953), 2215.

\(^3\)**Ibid.**

\(^4\)**St. Petersburg Independent**, September 14, 1953. (Latham's scrapbook.)

received a double-starred listing—indicating that it was highly recommended\(^1\) and suggesting that it was suitable background material for early American History, possessing developmental values for character building.\(^2\)

**Medals For Morse: Artist and Inventor**

Miss Latham's second book, *Medals for Morse: Artist and Inventor*, a biography for young people, was published in 1954, also by Aladdin Books as part of the American Heritage series. The illustrations by Douglas Gorsline were termed "excellent" by the *Library Journal*.\(^3\)

This is the story of Samuel F. B. Morse, self-taught artist at four, who never fully relinquished his dream of becoming a famous artist. After attending Exeter Academy and Yale he went to London and studied art at the Royal Academy, but, while in London, he witnessed a phenomenal demonstration of electricity, which suggested to him the need for a quicker method of communication.

Upon his return to the United States, however, the talented young artist devoted himself to painting and worked hard for success until his wife died. Stunned by his loss, he then gave up painting and threw his energies into perfecting a system for transmitting symbols by electrical impulses—the telegraph.

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The critics noted that this book which filled a gap in the saga of world communication and needed to be written, is an addition to any biography collection.¹ Shirley Barker, herself an author of historical novels, found Miss Latham's new book . . . a real contribution to literature acquainting us with famous Americans. Written with charm and imagination as well as historical accuracy it will appeal alike to children and to many readers who have put childhood behind but are looking for exact information simply put.²

The critic for the Chicago Sunday Tribune said that this book meets "a definite need in juvenile literature . . . action packed for junior high interest, written in a style simple enough for fifth graders or the older children afflicted with that dread disease 'can't readitis.'"³ Other critics agreed that the authentic information is "welded" by Miss Latham's "magic" into a book that adults will find "absorbing." As Cecelia Flicking said:

. . . it will appeal alike to children and to many readers who have put childhood behind but are looking for exact information simply put.⁴

Helen Perdue made this statement in her review:

Though the sense of frustration, through the years it took him to succeed with the telegraph, is

¹Ibid.
²St. Petersburg Independent, September 25, 1954.
(Latham's scrapbook.)
³Chicago Sunday Tribune, November 14, 1950, p. 28.
⁴St. Petersburg Independent, September 25, 1954.
(Latham's scrapbook.)
glossed over by a casual style, the portrait of him is at least companionable if not deep.\footnote{1}

As to the characterization of the man, Morse, all except one critic considered him sympathetically and realistically portrayed through the dialogue. Eithna Sheehan, writing for the New York Times Book Review, dissented: "Unfortunately the dialogue sounds improbable, and the characters are all drawn in one dimension. . . . Morse remains without life."\footnote{2}

\textit{Medals for Morse} received a single star recommendation by the \textit{Library Journal}\footnote{3} and was translated into German.\footnote{4}

\textbf{Carry On, Mr. Bowditch}

\textit{Carry On, Mr. Bowditch}, Miss Latham's third book established her as a successful author of biographies for young people. Published in 1955 by Houghton Mifflin when other publishers refused to touch it,\footnote{5} this story of a little-known mathematician proved to be a great success for the author and the publisher. This book is beautifully illustrated with chapter headings and double-page spreads by John O'Hara Cosgrave II.

The title, \textit{Carry On, Mr. Bowditch}, epitomized the

\footnote{1}{Bulletin from the Virginia Kirkus' Bookshop Service, XXII (July 15, 1954), 439.}
\footnote{3}{\textit{Library Journal}, loc. cit.}
\footnote{4}{Interview with Miss Latham, May 30, 1959.}
\footnote{5}{Ibid.}
life of Nathaniel Bowditch, a human calculating machine. In spite of his dream of going to Harvard, he became of necessity an indentured apprentice to a ship chandler in Salem for nine long, back-breaking years. His genius for figures and learning impelled his small body to "carry on" beyond long hours of duty in order to learn navigation, astronomy, languages and mathematics. To read Newton's *Principia* he had learned Latin, and, when he was freed from his indenture at the age of twenty-one, he had become a self-made scholar.

Nurtured on the sea, he was well qualified to write *The American Practical Navigator* before he was thirty. It was first published in 1802, and is still the standard text on navigation at the U. S. Naval Academy.

Critics were enthusiastic about the book and commended the author for her courage in attempting the study and research necessary to write the life of a mathematician. For example, the critic for the *New York Herald Tribune Book Review* commented on Miss Latham's writing ability:

> She has created out of a mass of involved technical material, a living, dramatic story, which will hold the interest of most young people. It reads like a lively sea yarn, yet does not skimp on the mathematical and navigational data.¹

A number of critics recognized the book's educational value, especially in the fields of science and mathematics. Morris T. Longstreth, critic for the *Christian Science Monitor* praised

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Miss Latham's courage in attempting the life of a calculator. She has added a lovable genius to our roster of great Americans. She has put in a plug for education, subtly but surely, through her skill in picturing Nat. 1

Ruth Strang listed *Carry On, Mr. Bowditch* as useful for supplementary reading in mathematics classes, especially for adolescents who find reading and mathematics difficult. 2 In agreement was Mary K. Eakin who concluded that

... the fictionalized account makes good reading as a sea story as well as a biography and the book could be used as supplementary reading in mathematics classes. 3

The reviewer, Helen Perdue, observed in the *Library Journal*:

The oft-repeated phrase "you can do anything with mathematics" and the emphasis on accuracy will please teachers of the subject. 4

The critics commended Miss Latham's historical accuracy, her vivid portrayal of Bowditch's life, and her exciting presentation. The treatment of love and understanding in a family as seen in how Nat's family stuck together was appreciatively noted. 5 As Morris T. Longstreth said:

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3 *Bulletin of Children's Book Center University of Chicago* (Graduate Library School), IX (December, 1955), 59.


She [Miss Latham] has made us understand character better, for none can read this book without benefiting by Nat's example. Her keen feeling of human relationships and her economical style round out her achievement.1

This book received the top award of the year, the 1955 John Newbery Award, given annually by the children's librarians of the American Library Association for "the most distinguished contribution to American literature for children."2 Mr. Frederic G. Melcher, President of the R. R. Bowker Company, presented the Newbery Medal to Miss Latham on June 19, 1956, at the American Library Association convention at Miami Beach, Florida3 and Miss Latham's acceptance speech was printed in full in the August, 1956, Horn Book.4

Carry On, Mr. Bowditch received other recognitions. It was given honorable mention at the International Youth Library in Munich and was runner-up for the Hans Christian Andersen Award.5 It was also runner-up—-one of six—-for the Dorothy Canfield Fisher Children's Book Award.6 It was chosen as a Junior Literary Guild Selection and has been

1Christian Science Monitor, loc. cit.
2Tampa Sunday Tribune, August 12, 1956, p. 11-F.
3Miami Herald, June 20, 1956. (Latham's scrapbook.)
5Saturday Review, XXXIX (October 20, 1956), 62.
translated into five foreign languages. The recognition most appreciated by Miss Latham was its selection as a talking book for the blind and her selection by the Library of Congress to be the narrator.

The authoritative selection aids of outstanding books listed Carry On, Mr. Bowditch among their top selections. These are Harper's Holiday Book List for 1955, Nancy Larrick's A Parent's Guide to Children's Reading, the American Library Association's Basic Book Collection for Junior High Schools, Gateways to Readable Books, the annual publication of the 1959 Best Books for Children, compiled in the office of the Library Journal. Carry On, Mr. Bowditch was double-starred in the Children's Catalog, the Standard Catalog for High School Libraries, Best Sellers, and single-starred in the Library Journal.

Because it dramatizes the practical application of

1 Interview with Miss Latham, May 30, 1959.
2 Ibid.
5 Strang, loc. cit., p. 59.
7 Best Sellers, January 1, 1956. (Latham's scrapbook.)
8 Library Journal, LXXX (November 15, 1955), 2646.
science and mathematics, it was mentioned by Daniel Melcher in an article relative to materials that come under the National Defense Education Act as an example of the type of books that may stimulate an interest in science and mathematics for young people.¹

Trail Blazer of the Seas

In the following year, 1956, Trail Blazer of the Seas was published by Houghton Mifflin Company. This book is enhanced by some excellent black and white illustrations drawn by Victor Mays. According to Virginia Kirkus, the "handsome prints, . . . many of which illustrate the implements with which Maury worked, supplement the story."²

It is the story of Matthew Fontaine Maury, a Tennessee boy, who despite strong family opposition, entered the navy and during the early 1800s pioneered in many naval developments. He received his appointment as midshipman through Samuel Houston, a member of Congress and friend. At this time the life of a midshipman was hard. All of his training was done at sea. Mat spent his whole life fighting against bitter opposition for his ideas, but his courage and perseverance were responsible for a Naval Academy; for better fortification of our southern ports; for separate steam lanes

¹Daniel Melcher, "Reading 'to Make a Full Man' Under the National Defense Education Act," Library Journal, LXXXIV (February 15, 1959), 618.

²Bulletin from the Virginia Kirkus' Bookshop Service, XXIV (September 13, 1956), 707.
for eastbound and westbound shipping in the Atlantic; for an organized system of study for midshipmen at sea; for revolutionizing maritime travel by charting the wind and sea currents; for founding the U. S. Weather Bureau; and for making possible eventually the laying of the transatlantic cable. Mat wrote the first book on mathematics to be used by the Naval Academy and planned the first peacetime conference in which our nation took part—the Brussels Conference on Ocean Meteorology in 1853. For this conference many foreign nations honored him, and soon he became the most decorated man born on American soil. While his own government gave insults instead of medals for his loyal and valuable service, in later years, before he retired, it recognized his merit and gave him appropriate recognition.

Since Trail Blazer of the Seas followed the Newbery Award winner Carry On, Mr. Bowditch, some of the critics compared unfavorably it with the latter. For example, the reviewer for the Saturday Review found that "it is a well executed biography, but it lacks the warmth and human quality of the author's Carry On, Mr. Bowditch." Also, the reviewer for Best Sellers said:

Matthew Fontaine Maury may not be so dynamic or appealing to young people as the hero in ... Carry On, Mr. Bowditch but [Trail Blazer of the Seas] is highly readable and subtle in its imitative values . . . [and] is also payment of honor long overdue to a man who should be known to young Americans.

1 Saturday Review, March 2, 1957, p. 38.
2 Best Sellers, December 15, 1956. (Latham's scrapbook.)
Peggy Sullivan, critic for the *Baltimore Sunday Sun*, expressed the opinion that

inevitably, this book will invite comparison with the earlier *Carry On, Mr. Bowditch* and, as good as it is, it does not measure up. In both biographies, the realistic dialogue is a strong point, but Bowditch probably had more appeal for young readers because his early life so deeply affected his later career.

Beatrice Bailin's review in the *Library Journal* compared *Trail Blazer of the Seas* with the Newbery Award winner and found that "it falls short of the latter in spark and in excitement, and is more juvenile in context." Learned T. Bulman, critic for the *New York Times Book Review*, was more generous and acclaimed it "another fine biography by Jean Lee Latham, [that] does not seize the reader's interest as quickly as did *Carry On, Mr. Bowditch*, but once caught, one enjoys it to the end." Disagreeing was the critic for the *Winston-Salem Journal and Sentinel* who commended the careful research "which brought much of the story to light" and added: "This is every bit as good a story as *Carry On, Mr. Bowditch*."

For the most part, the critics commended Miss Latham's ability to do research in a technical field and to sift the technical details and facts into action and dialogue. As

George H. Favre of the Christian Science Monitor pointed out, "For significant biography that is dramatic and filled with facts of interest to boys, this life of Matthew Fontaine Maury is hard to beat." The review in the New York Herald Tribune praised Miss Latham's ability to dramatize his struggle. The reader rushes ahead as full of interest in achievements as in a battle at sea. It is the technique used in the Newbery Prize-winning, Carry On, Mr. Bowditch. In her Newbery acceptance speech Miss Latham said it was being "back yard familiar" with the world of her story before she proceeded to "flesh the bones with reality." It is no small achievement to do this with a fairly uneventful life whose chief interest lies in blazing trails.

In Barbara Nolen's comparison with Carry On, Mr. Bowditch she stated: "The story is in the same brisk style which won Jean Lee Latham the Newbery Medal for a biography of another scientific sailor, Nathaniel Bowditch." Commending Miss Latham for her ability to conduct and use appropriately careful research, May H. Edmonds, critic for the Miami Herald wrote: "It not only establishes the atmosphere of the period ... but through it she arrives at important historical facts." The review in Yachting Magazine said:

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1 Christian Science Monitor, November 15, 1956, p. 17.
3 Washington Sunday Star, October 7, 1956. (Latham's scrapbook.)
4 Miami Herald, January 13, 1957. (Latham's scrapbook.)
It is not only an inspiring picture of Lt. Maury's achievements but a warm, human story of a man's life and a wonderful historical picture of the early nineteenth century. The wealth of detail makes one think she must have consulted almost as many documents as Lt. Maury did logs and observations.¹

This review also pointed out the value of sailing directions:

Sailing directions today are accepted almost as a matter of fact but anyone who has read Trail Blazer of the Seas could never again read them without first giving thought to the man who through his persistence first found "the paths of the sea."²

Albert D. Barker, critic for the St. Petersburg Independent, lavishly praised Miss Latham's ability to do the

... usual uncanny job of giving a "door" an authentic and personal life. She has also again performed the seeming miracle by which a landlubber handles nautico-technical terms and situations with all the accurate aplomb of an old A. B. Research must have been long and arduous.³

Peggy Sullivan mentioned the lasting qualities of the book:

Maury Hall in Annapolis is a memorial to him, as is the large monument in Richmond, Va. This book should prove to be another monument worth preserving, especially for boy readers who are always in search of a hero.⁴

A number of the critics already mentioned recommended this book for adults as well as for young people. Sea Frontiers also recommended it for adult readers. "... There is nothing technical about this book but, even though written for children, a grown scientist should find it interesting

¹Yachting Magazine, April, 1957. (Latham's scrapbook.)
²Ibid.
³St. Petersburg Independent, October 1, 1956, p. 16.
⁴Baltimore Sunday Sun, loc. cit.
reading."¹ The Newport News Daily Press stated, "This book... will appeal, not only to young people... but to people of all ages."² The Jackson (Tennessee) Sun acclaimed Trail Blazer of the Seas, "truly a thrilling story... written for teen-age readers but the author makes it read like a good sea story that anyone could enjoy."³

Like Miss Latham's other three books, Trail Blazer of the Seas is highly recommended for young people. Some of the critics pointed out its intangible values so beneficial to the growth and development of character training in young people. As May H. Edmonds indicated, "Young people feel the value of his perseverance."⁴ And George H. Favre concluded, "The story... is one of courage and enduring faith that will be an inspiration to young readers."⁵

Trail Blazer of the Seas was listed in the check list of some five-hundred juvenile and adult science books which publishers had selected from their catalogs as of special value to librarians in developing students' awareness of science.⁶ It also received the Gold Medal award from the

¹Sea Frontiers, June, 1957. (Latham's scrapbook.)
⁴Miami Herald, January 13, 1957. (Latham's scrapbook.)
⁵Christian Science Monitor, loc. cit.
Boy's Club of America.\textsuperscript{1} It is recommended by Virginia Kirkus and Best Sellers with a single star and is listed in the Children's Catalog and Standard Catalog for High School Libraries.

This Dear-Bought Land

This Dear-bought Land, published in 1957 by Harper and Brothers was illustrated by Jacob Landeau with black and white illustrations, considered "excellent."\textsuperscript{2}

In it Miss Latham turns from sea-going scientists and inventors to bring to life a historical period and an outstanding but often controversial figure of early American history. In order to portray Captain John Smith for the teenage reader Miss Latham used a device that she had never used in her previous books. She develops the character of John Smith through the eyes of a fifteen-year-old, David Warren. By using this device she was able to omit some of the unsavory episodes that are recorded in history, thus justifying the omission of certain details and still having a historically authentic account of John Smith's life.\textsuperscript{3}

David Warren was really not large enough nor old enough to fill a man's shoes the night his father was killed, but he took his place on the Susan Constant bound for the new world. Aboard the ship as a passenger was Captain John Smith

\textsuperscript{1}Miami Herald, April 28, 1957. (Latham's scrapbook.)
\textsuperscript{2}Newport News Daily Press, April 14, 1957, p. 27.
\textsuperscript{3}Interview with Miss Latham, May 30, 1959.
whose strength and courage both repelled and fascinated David. On the voyage Captain Smith's ridicule stung David into changing from passenger to crew member. The trip on board the ship as a sailor helped make a man of young David.

Although accused of mutiny and confined to quarters before the ship reached Virginia, Captain Smith emerges as a strong, courageous, hard leader whose very limitations of character become assets in the task of holding "this dear-bought land" against Indian attacks, financial ruin, summer heat, winter cold, fevers, illness and death.

This book is the result of research done by Miss Latham in 1936 when she found the following dramatic passage about Jamestown written by Captain John Smith, himself:

"It is my life, it has been my life, it has been my hawk, my hound, my wife, my child, the whole of my content - this dear-bought land." Miss Latham said that his tribute to America, "this dear-bought land," "gave my spine a tingle and ever since, no matter what I researched on, I researched on Jamestown, too." Critics generally agreed that This Dear-bought Land is a "credible and well told" story. While Trail Blazer of the Seas suffered in comparison with Carry On, Mr. Bowditch, the reviews of This Dear-bought Land are as favorable as those of her Newbery Award winner, if not more so. Best

1 Interview with Miss Latham, May 30, 1959.
2 Ibid.
3 Horn Book, XXXIII (April, 1957), 140.
Sellers said "... it is on a par with the former Newbery Award Winner." Also the New York Herald Tribune was lavish in its praise and considered it "by far the best of them all." The Saturday Review stated, "Jean Lee Latham who was awarded the Newbery Medal for her earlier Carry On, Mr. Bowditch, writes an even more compelling story in this portrayal of the settlement of Jamestown..." Margaret McFate in her review in the Library Journal said, "In her swiftly moving style, the author again makes history exciting and convincing." Polly Goodwin compared this book with several others on the same subject and called it, "outstanding among several new books celebrating this important anniversary [the Founding of Jamestown]."

The critics continue to commend Miss Latham for her ability through long hours of research to bring her characters to life. Typical is the statement: "One always wonders at the vast amount of research and understanding which combined to make Jean Lee Latham the great writer she has proved herself to be."

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1 Best Sellers, April 15, 1957. (Latham's scrapbook.)
6 Morgantown (W. Va.) Post, April 20, 1957. (Latham's scrapbook.)
The Virginia Kirkus review called it, "a polished narrative that shows careful research and a good sense of issues involved."¹

The comments by the critics on the character portrayal may be summed up in the words of Ellen Lewis Buell, critic for the New York Times Book Review:

Miss Latham has the knack of making people of the past seem very much alive. In this robust, full-bodied story she not only does that but also gives the readers an understanding of the immensity of this understanding.²

Not only was immediate reaction favorable, but This Dear-bought Land has brought praise for Miss Latham's literary ability. It is double-starred by Best Sellers, Junior Reviewers, and Library Journal. It is recommended with a single star in both the Children's Catalog and the Standard Catalog. It was listed in The Best In Catholic Reading For Children, 1958,³ listed as one of the notable children's books of 1957 in Top of the News,⁴ also in Best Books for Children 1959.⁵ Ruth Strang included it in her Gateways to

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¹Bulletin from the Virginia Kirkus' Bookshop Service, XXV (February 1, 1957), 80.
³The Best In Catholic Reading For Children, 1958. (Latham's scrapbook.)
⁴Top of the News, May, 1958, p. 43. (Latham's scrapbook.)
Readable Books and it was also listed by the American Library Association among the twenty-nine most distinguished juveniles of the year. It was chosen as a Junior Literary Guild selection and is the last of Miss Latham’s books to compete for this recognition. The monetary loss on a winner is too great, according to Miss Latham, to justify her permitting subsequent books to be entered in the competition.

On Stage, Mr. Jefferson!

The year 1958 found two books by Jean Lee Latham on the market, On Stage, Mr. Jefferson! and Young Man in a Hurry. The former, Miss Latham’s sixth biography for young people, was published by Harper and Brothers in the spring of 1958. The fine drawings by Edward Shenton were suggestive of the period and the characters.

Once again the author leaves her men of invention, science, and mathematics to "bring back alive" a man probably no better known to today’s children than was Bowditch. This book, a biography of the famous American actor, Joseph Jefferson III, is not only a story of Jefferson’s life and the early American theater, but is a good picture of the United States in the early 1800’s, when Chicago was a Western frontier town, and transportation was very difficult.

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1Ruth Strang, loc. cit., p. 20.
2Interview with Miss Latham, May 30, 1959.
3Ibid.
4Ibid.
5Elementary English, XXXV (November, 1958), 485.
The story concerns Joseph Jefferson, off-spring of a theatrical family playing the frontier theater circuit, who played his childhood behind footlights and his adult life in the star's spot light. Between the two he learned his trade by working as a stage hand, playing many small parts, growing in the hard years, and enjoying the easy ones. He married Margaret Lockyer, a successful actress, who retired to devote her time to Joe and their three children. By the time Joseph Jefferson reached the age of thirty-six, he ranked with Edwin Booth and Laura Keene. His performance of Rip Van Winkle in London was one of his major triumphs and the climax of *On Stage, Mr. Jefferson*.

The critics were once again divided in their opinions of this book. According to some of the critics, *On Stage, Mr. Jefferson* did not stand up as well as Miss Latham's other books. However, the adverse criticism was not harsh and all of the critics agreed that Joe's life should make appealing reading for young people. Robert Downing, of the *New York Times*, was critical of parts of the book, such as young Joe's contact with Abraham Lincoln and the mention of stars of the caliber of Edwin Booth and Laura Keene, who are "almost name-dropped into the narrative."¹ On the other hand he complimented the author for "pacing her story briskly and re-creating with considerable accuracy the historical backgrounds,"²

²Interview with Miss Latham, May 30, 1959.
and for the portrayal of notable contemporaries of the period.

The reviewer for the *Catholic Library World* found delightful the episode of the meeting of young Jefferson and Mr. Lincoln but regretted that sources were not indicated.\(^1\) Several critics commented on the lack of sources to prove the authenticity of certain scenes. They claimed this lack of sources left them and adult readers wondering about certain historical incidents related. In answer to these criticisms Miss Latham said that an accurate account of all episodes of historical significance is on file with the publisher; that she sends to the publisher a detailed explanation with authoritative sources of reference for all of her books; that for books of this type no footnotes nor sources are conventionally listed; and that any question about the authenticity of any episode may be cleared up by referring it to the publisher.\(^2\)

For the most part, all of the critics agreed that the author again brought to life the characters and presented a "lively entertaining story with a very graphic account of the hardships."\(^3\) They gave Miss Latham credit for culling "from the mass of information available about the subject a very successful sequence, subordinating certain phases of Jefferson's life."\(^4\) The critics were again divided as to Miss

\(^1\) *Catholic Library World*, XXX (October, 1958), 58-59.

\(^2\) Interview with Miss Latham, May 30, 1959.

\(^3\) *Best Sellers*, XVIII (April 15, 1958), 45. (Latham's scrapbook.)

\(^4\) Ibid.
Latham's ability to develop a character. The Chicago Tribune said, "Latham proves her talent for bringing men and events vigorously to life."¹ Saturday Review commended Miss Latham for, "bringing to life once again a little known character."² Dissenting was the reviewer for the St. Petersburg Independent, who stated, "Miss Latham fails to bring alive the dramatic personality that was Joe Jefferson."³

In spite of the fact that this book received, in part, less favorable reviews than any of Miss Latham's previous books, it was recommended for consideration by the Children's Catalog and with a single star by Best Sellers, moreover it made two lists of outstanding books for young people for 1958, namely, The Chicago Tribune list of "100 Fine Books for 1958,"⁴ and the New York Times "100 Outstanding Books for the Young Reader for 1958."⁵ Variety also listed it as a good book in theatrical subject matter.⁶ Albert R. Kline, professor of Dramatic Arts at Mary Washington College of the University of Virginia, stated that On Stage, Mr. Jefferson! should be read by all Americans because "not only is it an accurate picture of our developing theatre, but it depicts a

²Saturday Review, May 10, 1958, p. 49.
⁴Chicago Sunday Tribune, November 2, 1958, p. 12.
developing America."¹

**Young Man In A Hurry**

In the fall of 1958 Miss Latham's second book of that year, *Young Man In A Hurry*, came out under the Harper imprint. The fine black and white illustrations by Victor Mays were commended by several of the critics. Carolyn W. Field, reviewer for the *Library Journal* said, "The fine black and white illustrations add to the clarity of the technical details of this book."²

The "young man" in it was Cyrus W. Field who went to New York to seek his fortune at the age of fifteen. By the time he was thirty-five years old he had achieved wealth and success, and the one-time department store errand boy could well afford to retire.

He planned to enjoy a leisurely family life, long neglected, but history calls on competent men to do big jobs, and Cyrus Field worked with unfailing courage and patience for the next thirteen years to raise funds for the laying of the Atlantic cable. His efforts were successful, and he even had the vision to look toward the possibilities of laying a similar cable in the Pacific.

This book met with immediate success. Again the critics were enthusiastic about the author's ability to write

¹*Cameo*, Summer 1958, p. 34. (Latham's scrapbook.)
powerfully and interestingly about a technical subject. Barbara La Rosa said: "Miss Latham writes in such a vigorous and action-filled style, you're never really sure until the end whether Field will succeed in sending a message across the Atlantic."¹ Miss Latham particularly liked Barbara Nolen's comment about her and Field in the Washington Star: "Jean Lee Latham swings her readers into the same swivet of suspense as her hero."² All of the reviews, with the exception of one, were lavish in their praise of Young Man In A Hurry. The Horn Book expressed the opinion: "The story is powerfully written and intensely exciting. A magnificent book."³ The Virginia Kirkus Service stated, "Well written and documented, this is a substantial contribution to the library of American lives."⁴ The critic for the Atlantic Monthly found that among the many biographies that came out in the fall of 1958, "this book was one of the outstanding."⁵ Another critic said, "By any measure it is a grand book."⁶ Paula V. Kauffman said in her review of the book for The Pen Woman:

¹Young New Yorkers, October 3, 1958, p. 6. (Latham's scrapbook.)
²Interview with Miss Latham, May 30, 1959.
³Horn Book, XXXIV (October, 1958), 390.
⁴Bulletin from Virginia Kirkus' Bookshop Service, XXVI (July 1, 1958), 464.
⁵Atlantic Monthly, CII (December, 1958), 100.
⁶Montgomery (Ala.) Advertiser, September 4, 1955. (Latham's scrapbook.)
The distinguished authoress, ... [Jean Lee Latham] has combined all the elements of story-telling in this extremely readable recital of a historic milestone. Through her great artistry the reader quickly becomes a part of the dynamic era when Fields ... rode the North Atlantic gales and prayed for strength to see his job through.

They say Cyrus Field conquered the world for himself and the ocean for the world. Miss Latham has added to her literary stature by recounting this conquest - and in doing so has given the world a book of great merit.¹

The reviewer for Booklist made only a slightly unfavorable criticism by considering this book "less outstanding than the author's earlier books," though "a lively narrative" and the account of Field's life "engrossingly detailed."²

As with the other books by Miss Latham, critics found it a book to be enjoyed by adults as well as young people. Many agreed with the reviewer of the Christian Science Monitor when he said, "The 12's on up would do well to share this volume with the whole family."³

Young Man In A Hurry was recommended with a single star by Kirkus⁴ and the Library Journal.⁵ It was recommended by both the Children's Catalog and the Standard Catalog for High School Libraries. It was the second book by Miss Latham

¹The Pen Woman, October, 1958, p. 21. (Latham's scrapbook.)
²Booklist, CV (October 1, 1958), 80.
³Christian Science Monitor, November 6, 1958, p. 21.
⁴Bulletin from Virginia Kirkus' Bookshop Service, XXVI (July 1, 1958), 464.
⁵Library Journal, LXXXIII (November 15, 1958), 3307.
listed in the check list of about five hundred juvenile and
adult science books which publishers have selected from their
catalogs as of special value in developing students' aware-
ness of science.  

_Drake The Man They Called Pirate_

_In April, 1960, Drake The Man They Called Pirate_ was
put on the market by Harper and Brothers.  

This eighth biography for young people by Jean Lee Latham has black and white drawings by Frederick T. Chapman.

This is the story of a man called by some a pirate, who at the age of ten had spent most of his life on an old worm-eaten hulk of a ship with his family. Fascinated by the sea and the yarns of the sailors, Fran was determined to become the best master mariner in England. He left home and apprenticed himself for seven long, hard years of training under the roughest, toughest, but the best master mariner in England. Captain Adam Tanner trained Fran with a hard hand, but well. Eager to learn all the Captain knew, Fran was quick and willing to suffer any abuse. Then Captain Tanner died and left his ship, the _Sally_, to Fran. As Master Drake, he hired three young men who willingly and cheerfully sailed up and down the coast of England with Fran. Fran was a good leader and had the respect of his men. After a while, Fran

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1"Science Books to Implement the National Defense Education Act," _loc. cit._

2_Publisher's Weekly_, CLXXVII (April 18, 1960), 69.
reluctantly sold his ship and sailed on a merchant vessel. While in the Caribbean he witnessed the lying treachery of the Spanish when his dear and close friend was killed. He vowed vengeance, stating that they would pay for this dastardly act and the price would be high. He promised "to singe the beard" of the King of Spain. For years and with great courage he carried on a one-man war against King Philip of Spain. He raided the Spanish shipping and stole their treasures from the warehouses on the islands. Because of his daring and success he was dreaded as a pirate, but gained a reputation of being kind to his prisoners. Actually, he was not a buccaneer but a privateer working for the Queen of England.

After successfully sailing his fleet of ships through the Strait of Magellan, weathering brutal storms in the Pacific, and attacking Spanish shipping along the West Coast of South America, he returned triumphant to England. Queen Elizabeth knighted him as the first Englishman to go through the Strait, to sail in the Pacific, to establish trade with the Pacific Islands, and to sail around the world.

Many years of pleading with the Queen to attack King Philip of Spain brought Fran banishment on several occasions. She hoped to keep the peace and could never completely approve of Fran's attacks on the King's shipping and ports. Finally King Philip sent the Armada into the English Channel for an invasion of England. With a shortage of English ships, ammunition, and adverse weather conditions, Sir Francis Drake,
now Vice-Admiral of the English Navy, courageously led forty-six little ships against the mighty Armada that spread seven miles across the English Channel. Through Fran's cunning tactics he was able to heckle the huge Armada and to keep it from invading England.

After having saved England from the tyranny of Spain, Fran received only an upbraiding from the queen because he had failed to capture enough ships and treasure to make the expedition pay for itself. In the minds of many of his contemporaries he was considered a pirate rather than a courageous privateer working for his Queen and Country.

Like the other biographies, Miss Latham's Drake The Man They Called A Pirate received very favorable reviews. In referring to all of Miss Latham's books, the critic for the New York Herald Tribune said: "They have all been exciting, readable and informative, especially convincing in the parts dealing with the study of navigation." He went on to add "It is natural she [Miss Latham] should turn to one of the greatest seamen of all time, Francis Drake. Miss Latham gives us the education of the Elizabethan seaman—the apprenticeship years are among the most successful in the whole book." In commending the character portrayal he said: "The hesitations and fickleness of the Queen are clearly presented and the whole book shows conscientious study." This critic was not all praise: "The great brash Elizabethan spirit does not emerge as a living personality from this carefully worked out and vigorously told story." He thought that the dialogue
slowed down the action rather than "enhancing the excitement,"; it "always clips the wings of our imagination by avoiding any suggestion of the rich Elizabethan speech." The Book Buyer's Guide stated that this biography was "exciting and very readable. It makes Drake a very likable guy, perhaps a little too faultless, but he really lives on these pages." 1

The Virginia Kirkus Service gave this book a single star which means that it is especially recommended. The reviewer said: "Sir Francis Drake's life was one of colorful achievement and this biography does much to convey the richness of even and atmosphere." 2

The reviewer for the St. Petersburg Times found this book to be "a stimulating biography." 3 Carolyn W. Field reviewer for the Junior Libraries stated Drake to be an "excellent biography that not only brings to life the complex personality of the controversial and dynamic Sir Francis Drake but vividly portrays the dramatic period of England under Elizabeth I." 4 May H. Edmonds, critic for the Miami Daily News, commended Miss Latham for emphasizing "characteristics that have gone out of fashion in the youth of today,

1 New York Herald Tribune, May 8, 1960. (Latham's scrapbook.)
3 Bulletin from the Virginia Kirkus' Bookshop Service, XXVIII (February 1, 1960), 96.
4 St. Petersburg Times, April 25, 1960, p. 10-D.
perseverance and patience."¹ She also recognized the "careful research [that] makes [Miss Latham's] book a valuable contribution to the field."²

Due to the recency of publication of this latest book by Miss Latham there are very few reviews available to date, and Ditake This Man They Called a Pirate is too recent to be included in the various selection aids. From the few reviews this writer has read it is evident that this book will be rated along with all seven other juvenile books by Miss Latham as a notable contribution to biography for young people for the sheer enjoyment that reading it brings, for the historical information presented with dramatic force, and for the developmental values that are motivating forces in the lives of the characters.

¹Miami Daily News, n.d. (Latham's scrapbook.)
²Ibid.
SUMMARY

Jean Lee Latham has written eight biographies for young people since she started writing in this medium in 1953. Of the eight biographies, five deal with technical and scientific matter; The Story of Eli Whitney, Medals for Morse, Carry On, Mr. Bowditch, Trail Blazer of the Seas, and Young Man In A Hurry. The other three, This Dear-bought Land, Drake The Man They Called A Pirate, and On Stage, Mr. Jefferson present two adventurers and an actor in the historical settings of their respective periods.

In her literary output in a new medium, Miss Latham's work has been superior. Even though her first two books received fewer reviews than the later ones, they were rated very high and received very creditable reviews. That Miss Latham's skill in writing this type of literature has improved since the publication of her first two books is shown in the awards given her later works and the many consistently excellent reviews given them by the critics. Only in a very few instances did any of the books receive adverse criticism and even then the comments were unfavorable only in part.

Of the seven books that have been published long enough for consideration, five are listed in the Children's Catalog and the Standard Catalog for High School Libraries.
One is double-starred and the others are single-starred. Even though two books that were not included in these two lists have been published long enough for consideration, they did receive attention from leading contemporary critics who found them of merit. Two of five books published were Literary Guild Selections before Miss Latham decided against entering others for the competition. Three of the eight books were highly recommended by Best Sellers, the Virginia Kirkus Service, six by the Library Journal, and one by Junior Reviewers. One received the Gold Metal Award from the Boys' Club of America and one received the highest award offered in the country, the John Newbery Award. Two were listed in a check list of Scientific Books to implement the National Defense Education Act.

All eight of Miss Latham's books are of the same type, namely, fictionalized biographies for young people. They are characterized by the lively dialogue that vividly and realistically develops the characters. All of them have certain features in common. Each accurately portrays a historical period. All the main characters have made outstanding and lasting contributions to the world and their interesting lives have been so long neglected that they remained in relative obscurity. As Miss Latham says, "These men actually found me and I brought 'em back alive."\(^1\) Also evident in each of these books is the author's research and ability to

\(^1\)Interview with Miss Latham, May 30, 1959.
handle very technical scientific subjects in an entertaining and readable style that will appeal to young people.

Although Miss Latham aims her biographies at the teenage reader and they are especially recommended by the authorities as suitable for the age group eleven through sixteen, all books that have been reviewed are recommended also for adult readers.

Because of the reliability of the facts, these books are recommended by authorities as supplementary for reading enrichment in social studies, science, and mathematics. Also, because of Miss Latham's keen insight into character development and training, they are cited as helpful in teaching many spiritual and ethical values. Each book subtly instills in youth an admiration for perseverance, fortitude, faith, courage, and hope as shown as lasting qualities of each of Miss Latham's main characters. These subtle characteristics make her books an inspiration for the young and old alike.

A teenage reader sums up the quality of appeal found in Jean Lee Latham's books by saying:

When I read history I sometimes get the feeling that none of it really happened.

But when I read Miss Latham's books, the characters are like people I know. They live and breathe, and their problems become my problems.\(^1\)

\(^1\) *Miami News*, October 19, 1958, p. 8-B.
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