

6-25-16

A Tribute to Emilie Wenban-Smith Brash: Granddaughter of Charles Valentine Riley

The Person

Emilie Wenban-Smith Brash, 1931-2015, known as Jill by family and friends, was born in England to a daughter of Charles Valentine Riley. Emilie's mother was Helen Riley Petrea Wenban-Smith and her father was William Edmund Wenban-Smith. Helen was one of 5 sisters and two brothers: Alice (born 1879), William (b 1881), Mary Gine (b 1883), Harold (b 1884), Helen (b 1887) Thora (b 1888), and Cathryn Vedralia (b 1891).

Emilie first went to school in Haslemere in Surry, UK and later attended Lakeside School in Malvern, Worcestershire. Subsequently, she attended Guildford Tech where she read chemistry, biology and zoology. She spent her professional career as a biochemist and assistant to Dr. George Little in Hyde Style Chest Hospital in Godalming, Surrey. In later life, Emilie offered her services to Meals-on-Wheels, the British Legion and others.

Emilie had a wide range of interests including playing bridge, music, arts and the theatre, reading, gardens and animals, especially Cavalier King Charles spaniels. She was a wonderful friend to many and played a special role as a godmother and step grandmother to several children. She was always keen to hear about their achievements and was as caring a godmother and step grandmother as any child could have. She had the rare quality of being good listener.

Emilie loved to travel, going away on holidays to the United States, Canada, Mexico, India and various parts of Europe. She made a number of trips to the United States beginning in 1983 in support of the Riley Memorials Program and beginning in 1985 in support of the Charles Valentine Riley Memorial Foundation (RMF).

In 1986, Emilie married Colin Brash to the delight of all that knew her. The newly married couple settled in Bindon Cottage in Headly Down, Hampshire. Colin and Emilie enjoyed many of the same the interests. RMF Directors were fortunate to have the opportunity to get to know Emilie and Colin during their trips to the United States and one of us had the privilege of having tea with them in their garden at Bindon Cottage or lunch or dinner in nearby Guildford on a number of occasions.

Contributions to the National Agricultural Library

Emilie was a true friend to the National Agricultural Library (NAL). She supported the donation of the Charles Valentine Riley Papers to NAL's Special Collections. Early donations consisted of original correspondence, reports, photographs, original drawings, paintings, handwritten lecture notes, and a diary. Other donations included photographs, drawings, Riley's field microscope, and his roll-top desk.

In addition to Emilie's donating the 1858 sketchbook of drawings created by Charles Valentine Riley during a trip to Prussia, she made generous donations to support the conservation treatment of the sketchbook and other early Riley documents.

In 1983, Emilie presented the French Grand Gold Medal, given to Charles Valentine Riley for his contributions to the French wine industry, to USDA's Assistant Secretary Orville Bentley at the annual meeting of the Washington Entomological Society. The medal is archived at NAL. In 1985, Emilie presented an 1891 oil portrait of Riley painted by Henry Ulke, who was known as a "Painter of Presidents," to USDA's Secretary of Agriculture John Block which is also archived at NAL.

Contributions to Charles Valentine Riley Memorial Program and Foundation

USDA program and Riley Memorial Foundation. In 1984, Emilie presented a check to USDA's Secretary of Agriculture John Block as the initial contribution towards a \$150,000 gift to the Secretary from the Catheryn Vedalia Riley Trust to be used to support activities to honor Charles Valentine Riley. Resources from this original gift were used by USDA to plan and conduct the original Riley Memorials Program with the assistance of an advisory group. Most of the members of the advisory group and Emilie became charter members of the Charles Valentine Riley Memorial Foundation (RMF) when it was founded in 1985 as a Washington, DC corporation and an IRS public charity. Emilie continued to be involved with RMF as a Director or Director Emeritus until her death in 2015.

Fulfilling the wishes of Catheryn Vedalia Riley. On a number of occasions, Emilie commented to RMF Directors that she knew that her Aunt Catheryn's Trust and Estate were valued at much more than Victor John Yannecone, Jr., Trustee of the Trust and Executor of the related Estate had acknowledged. Consequently, in 1994, Emilie signed a letter prepared with the assistance of Susan Flaherty of the Washington, DC law firm of Roha and Flaherty and RMF, to the New York Charities Bureau (NYCB) on behalf of her aunt and the Cathryn Vedalia Riley Trust requesting an accounting of the Trust.

After failing to have any response to Mrs. Brash's letter, RMF retained Ms. Flaherty in 1997 to assist with communications with the NYCB. After some time, the NYCB ruled that Emilie did not have standing, but that RMF did because Catheryn's Trust Indenture called for all of her assets, after any outstanding personal commitments were met, be used by a public charity to honor her father. RMF had been formed for that same purpose.

As result of Emilie's knowledge and concern that the wishes of her Aunt Cathryn be fulfilled, together with the efforts by RMF and NYCB, \$500,000 became available in 2008 to establish the Charles Valentine Riley Memorial Endowment. The endowment was placed at the American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS) to periodically hold a distinguished lecture in Riley's name. Thus, arrangements were made to honor the legacy of Professor Riley in perpetuity with programs designed to *promote a broader and more complete understanding of agriculture as the most basic human endeavor and to enhance agriculture through increased scientific knowledge.*

As of 2016 seven Riley Lectures have been held at AAAS along with seven associated Riley leadership breakfasts that were initiated by RMF but are now associated with the lecture and are planned jointly by RMF and AAAS. In addition, six additional events related to support of food,

agricultural and natural resources research organized by RMF have been hosted by AAAS and more such events are planned,

A Special Acknowledgment. RMF is greatly indebted to Emilie Wenban-Smith Brash for her knowledge, desire, and commitment to see that the wishes of her Aunt Cathryn, as expressed in her Trust Indenture to honor her father were fulfilled. The result has made possible the excellent collaboration between RMF, AAAS and other partners in the conduct of the annual Riley Memorial Lecture and a number of other events to honor Charles Valentine Riley. All that knew Emilie will remember her as a very gracious, caring and generous person.

*Richard Ridgway
President Emeritus
Riley Memorial Foundation
Flower Mound, TX, USA*

*Colin Brash
Bindon Cottage
Headley Down, Hampshire
United Kingdom*

*Susan Fugate
Special Collections
National Agricultural Library
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Emilie Wenban-Smith Brash presents a check to USDA's Secretary of Agriculture John Block in 1984 as a gift from the Catherine Vidalia Riley Trust to be used to honor Charles Valentine Riley



