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John Muir's granddaughter-in-law gifts Yosemite oil painting to University of the Pacific

*Gladys Hanna is among nine Muir family members who are Pacific alumni
Painting of Vernal Fall by noted landscape artist William Keith belonged to John Muir*

John Muir's granddaughter-in-law today will make a permanent gift of a 125-year-old Yosemite oil painting by renowned Western landscape painter William Keith to University of the Pacific, her alma mater.

Gladys Hanna and her late husband, Muir's grandson Ross Hanna, are among nine Muir family members to have been educated at Pacific. The painting of Vernal Fall, which hung in Muir's Martinez home during his lifetime, will become a permanent part of the Holt-Atherton Special Collections at Pacific, available for students and the public to study and view in perpetuity. Painted in 1891, it depicts the waterfall along the Mist Trail and John Muir Trail in Yosemite National Park.

"I would hope that through the eyes of the painter, those who view the painting will feel the power of the rushing water, smell the scent of the air and trees, but also feel the peace of nature and want to experience it on their own," said Hanna. The gift is from both Hanna and her late husband.

Since 1970, the Muir-Hanna family has entrusted the university with a vast collection of Muir's notebooks, journals, letters, photos and drawings, as well as his writing desk, bookshelves and books from his personal library. Approximately 75 percent of existing Muir documents are preserved at Pacific, representing the largest repository of his papers in the world.

"On behalf of the university, I want to express our deep gratitude to Gladys and Ross Hanna for this extraordinary gift," said Pacific President Pamela A. Eibeck. "It is fitting that William Keith's painting of Yosemite will augment the papers of John Muir, a man who petitioned Congress to establish Yosemite National Park and whose activism preserved Yosemite Valley, Sequoia National Park and other wilderness areas for posterity."

Daniel Kasser, professor of art at Pacific, said the painting preserves Muir's spirit.

"For students of the arts and environmental philosophy, William Keith's painting of Vernal Fall is a portal into the 19th century landscape painter's sense of wonder and reverence for the primal beauty and grandeur of our country," Kasser said. "It prepares us all to understand the continuity between Keith and contemporary landscape painters, equally committed to preserving the spirit of Muir and our collective affection for our national parks."

Muir the naturalist and Keith the painter both were born in Scotland in 1838 and immigrated to the United States as boys. They first met in California, where they forged what would become an almost 40-year friendship rooted in a mutual love of the High Sierra.

Muir called Keith a “poet-painter,” and Keith was part of the group of friends who worked with Muir to help create Yosemite National Park. Keith was also among those who encouraged Muir to establish the association that would become the Sierra Club.

Keith today is regarded as a member of the canon of great Western painters. Historians believe he painted nearly 4,000 paintings, but some 2,000 were destroyed in the 1906 San Francisco fire. Keith’s remaining paintings are in the collections of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the de Young Museum, Crocker Art Museum, Oakland Museum of California, and the Haggin Museum in Stockton, among others. The largest collection of Keith canvasses is at St. Mary’s College of California.

A prolific writer and sketcher, Muir left behind a wealth of papers that were kept by family members and several libraries. In 1970, the family entrusted the bulk of the materials to Pacific. Included are nearly 7,000 letters, nearly 100 journals and notebooks, hundreds of drawings and manuscript drafts, and thousands of photographs. The Vernal Fall painting had been on loan to Pacific’s Holt-Atherton Special Collections since 1988.

“The John Muir Papers are housed at the university and they’ve been taken care of beautifully and available to everybody,” Hanna said, explaining the decision to make a permanent gift of the painting. “My children and I decided we would like to have our painting there also.”

The Holt-Atherton Special Collections gathers, preserves and provides access to manuscript collections made up of primary sources that focus primarily on California and American history, as well as a specialized book collection on the American West. In addition to the John Muir Papers, it houses the George R. Moscone papers, Brubeck Collection, Japanese-American Internment Collections, and a Western Americana collection.

Muir and his wife, Louisa, had two daughters, Helen Funk and Wanda Hanna, who between them had 10 children. Edna Virginia Hanna, the wife of Ross’ older brother, John Muir Hanna, was the first to graduate from Pacific in 1934. Gladys graduated in 1947 and Ross in 1949. The third generation saw four more family members educated at Pacific.

Gladys Stoeven and Ross Hanna first met at Pacific, where she majored in music and he studied business administration and also led a jazz band. She had a career as a school teacher in San Mateo and Stockton before the couple relocated to Dixon, where Ross became a partner in the Stoeven meat packing company and also led the Phabulous Phirehouse Philharmonics jazz band. The couple lived in Hawaii for a time after retirement. A World War II veteran, Ross Hanna died in June 2014.

“Pacific holds a dear place in my heart,” Gladys Hanna said. “I loved my experience there.”

The Holt-Atherton Special Collections, located on the ground floor of Pacific's library, are free and open to the public between 10 a.m. and 5 p.m. Monday through Friday except holidays and the week between Christmas and New Year's Day.

In addition, many of the materials in the collections have been digitized – including a large share of the John Muir Papers – and can be accessed online at go.pacific.edu/archives. Volunteers are invited to help transcribe the remaining papers. More information about the John Muir Transcription Project is available at pacific.edu/muirwords.

About University of the Pacific

Founded in 1851 as the first chartered institution of higher education in California, University of the Pacific prepares students for professional and personal success through rigorous academics, small classes, and a supportive and engaging culture. Widely recognized as one of the most beautiful private university campuses in the West, the Stockton Campus offers more than 80 areas of study in seven schools. The university's distinctive Northern California footprint also includes its San Francisco Campus, home to the Arthur A. Dugoni School of Dentistry and new graduate programs in health, food and technology fields, and Sacramento Campus, home to the Pacific McGeorge School of Law and new graduate programs in health, education, business, public policy and analytics. For more information, visit www.pacific.edu.

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