Jean Sebastian Yolton (1924-2008)

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Born in Cincinnati, Ohio on 22 March 1924, Jean S. Yolton, librarian, bibliographer, scholar, cordon bleu cook, and widow of John W. Yolton, died of apparent cardiac arrest in her Piscataway, New Jersey home on 15 January 2008. She is survived by two daughters and two granddaughters.

Probably best known to Locke scholars as the compiler of *John Locke: A Descriptive Bibliography* (1998), Jean Yolton was the author, translator, editor, and co-editor of numerous bibliographical and other studies, focusing largely on Locke and related subjects. Much of her scholarship was conducted while holding posts first as a serials cataloguer in the Robarts Library of the University of Toronto, and later as Rare Books Cataloguer at the Van Pelt Library of the University of Pennsylvania. Jean’s most important publication as a librarian at the Robarts Library is her compilation of the comprehensive Union List of Microform Sets in the Ontario Council of University Librarians, edited by Jean and Anni Leibl.

Since the early 1950s Jean accompanied John on fellowships and sabbaticals, especially to England and France, and conducted research in various libraries there. While in Oxford from 1950 to 1952, she worked with R. Wilmot, head bookbinder to the Bodleian Library, gaining proficiency in hand bookbinding. A number of the volumes in the Yoltons’ extensive collection of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century books benefited from repairs, rebinding, or rebacking at her expert hand, as have a few volumes of my own, particularly my copy of Cudworth’s *True Intellectual System of the Universe*. Jean’s expertise in antiquarian books was bolstered by her work with Frank Sanders, bookseller in Oxford, during the academic year 1955–6. This expertise constantly aided her husband’s research, and her book skills are evident in the detailed bibliographies appended to many of his studies, starting in 1956 with his
John Locke and the Way of Ideas.

In the late 1970s, Jean began to work on a comprehensive descriptive bibliography of Locke’s works. The research for this project took the Yoltons to a staggering number of locations, including Oxford’s Bodleian and numerous college libraries, Cambridge’s Trinity, King’s, and University Library, Exeter, Winchester, Aberdeen, St. Andrews, Edinburgh, Glasgow, the National Library of Scotland, Marsh’s Library in Dublin, Leeds, York, Keele, and the (then) British Museum, as well as to the Bibliothèque Nationale, Harvard, the Pierpont Morgan Library, the Folger Shakespeare Library, and various repositories in Germany.

Jean developed a number of ambitious and restricted offshoots of this extended project from the seventies until shortly after the Bibliography appeared with Thoemmes in 1998. The larger of these include her work with John on the Clarendon edition of Locke’s Education (1989), her collection, A Locke Miscellany (1990), and her study of Locke’s translation of parts of Pierre Nicole’s Essais, entitled John Locke as Translator (2000).1 The annotated list of works on Locke published in 1985 as John Locke: A Reference Guide that she compiled with John was also a by-product of her long-range venture. Brief studies, beginning with ‘John Locke’s Some Thoughts Concerning Education’, and concluding with ‘Locke’s Copy of the Extract (Abregé) of his Essay (1688)?’, appeared with regularity for twenty years. One of the more delightful of the brief studies is her ‘Locke’s “coquinaria”’, which appeared coincidentally with the International Colloquium on the Historical Study of the Works of John Locke I organized with John at Rutgers in 1983. Modifications of some of Locke’s recipes2 Jean presented in that essay formed the basis of the dinner at the Yoltons’


2 ‘Bugg Ale’, an infusion of ‘six hundred Sowes or Woodlice Red Sage & Rue’ in four gallons of ale, was simply not on, even for dedicated Locke scholars. Despite my entreaties, neither was ‘Millepedes Ale’ judged suitable for delicate twentieth-century palates. MS Locke c. 25 f. 85.
home which concluded the colloquium.

*John Locke: A Descriptive Bibliography*, the culmination of a life’s work, is doubtless the book by which most scholars now, and for some time to come, will know of Jean Yolton. It is now the authoritative study for precise descriptions of Locke’s publications in all their variants, and for the dissemination of Locke’s works to the turn of the nineteenth century. Written with charm and wit, it dispels bibliographical myths and establishes variants in Locke’s works with equal authority, meeting completely, as Ian Harris noted in his review nine years ago, its intended goals, and establishing itself as ‘a necessity for any scholarly student of Locke’.

The charm, wit, and authority with which this work was written were cardinal features of its author’s personality, as those who were fortunate enough to know her (and patient and perceptive enough to penetrate her gruff carapace) realized and appreciated. Imaginative, learned, industrious, and casually generous, Jean Yolton aided scholars and Locke scholarship in unobtrusive ways, ways beyond the undoubted value of her publications. Whether they are aware of it or not, students of Locke are, and will be for some time to come, indebted to her.

*Eighteenth-Century Thought*