

HOCKEY STICKS IN THE ARCHIVES: Learning about Wilson College through collection items

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All archives have their oddities. In the past, I have worked with collections that included Fiestaware, a dried scorpion, correspondence about a shotgun wedding, human hair, carpet samples, a briefcase full of buttons, and faxes in Japanese. All of those oddities have stories. While strolling through the shelves in the **C. Elizabeth Boyd '33** Archives at Wilson College, I quickly noticed the hockey sticks.

There are three total; one, wrapped in plastic, appears to be suffering from water damage and mold. The other two are almost identical. They are marked with several logos and were made in England. I could find no paperwork about the sticks and other than a label stuck to one which reads: "Property of the Wilson College Chemistry Dept." There is no information about who might have used or donated them. A quick Google search confirmed that one of the logos "Grays of Cambridge" was the name of a major field hockey equipment manufacturer. I decided to try the only contact information that was available: an email address for a sales representative in the UK. I explained my question and promised to provide photos of the sticks if there was anyone at the company who would be willing to help me. I did not expect much more than an automated response. I was surprised when I not only got a prompt, interested response from the sales contact, but they offered to pass my request, along with the photos, to a Richard Gray.

Mr. Gray was quite excited about the Wilson College hockey sticks. He confirmed that they had been made in Cambridge, England, around 1956 out of English ash. One of the logos was designed to celebrate Grays' centenary in 1955. Another logo "Gray Towers" was a mystery and Richard Gray promised to pass the request on to his uncle, John Gray. Uncle John remembered that the Gray Towers logo referred to the sticks' importer. In the 1950s Grays sticks were sold to only six or seven customers in the United States; one was Tower Associates.

While the explanations from the Grays placed the hockey sticks in time, many other questions about them remain. What did become clear was the strong history of field hockey that must exist at Wilson to justify imported sticks identified with the chemistry department being preserved in the college archives.

Field hockey has been played at Wilson College for almost as long as the sport has been known in the United States. According to the United States Field Hockey Association, the sport was introduced to Americans in 1901 by English physical education instructor Constance M.K. Applebee. Starting with an exhibition game at Harvard, Applebee proceeded to tour American women's colleges teaching the game. Applebee spent a week in November 1903 at Wilson College. According to *The Pharetra* field hockey deserves its popularity "for it is a splendid scientific and healthful game."

Wilson's first field hockey game was won by the freshmen (Class of 1907), 3-2 over the sophomores (Class of 1906) on November 24, 1903. In the spring, *The Pharetra* noted that hockey would "be played until the weather becomes too warm for such violent exercise." The freshmen, wearing red skirts and white sweaters with red numbers went on to win the first Hockey Class Championship on May 13, 1904 with a 7-1 victory over the juniors.

