

# Peter Rabbit at the Turnbull Library

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In 1930 the Turnbull Library was offered a collection of four letters from Beatrix Potter by William Ferguson of Wellington. His letter to Johannes Andersen, the Librarian, explains both the provenance and nature of the collection and associated items:

In going through the treasures of my late wife I found a bundle containing the Correspondence which the late Miss Beatrix Potter had with, and about, my infant daughter, Louisa Sefton Ferguson, who died twenty years ago. As Miss Beatrix Potter was well known as an author & illustrator of Children's Books It occurred to me that possibly you might like to have the autographed books and the letters for the Turnbull Library.

I therefore enclose for your Consideration

Ginger & Pickles autographed Jany 8th 1910

Letter from Miss Potter of the same date

The Roly Poly Pudding New Year 1909

A Framed Illustrated Letter from Miss Potter 26th Feby 1908

A Framed Post Card Photo of Benjamin Bunny 21 Novr 1907

Letter Oct 12th 1910 from Miss Potter to my wife on hearing of the death of her little Correspondent

Peter Rabbit's Painting Book Sent to Mrs Ferguson Oct 1911...<sup>1</sup>

The collection, which was accepted, is an example of the type of correspondence Beatrix Potter had with children all over the world. Her published work had its origin in small illustrated stories which she sent in letter form to the children of friends and relatives. The letter to Louisa Ferguson of 26 February 1908 demonstrates fully the way she infused into her sketches and stories an acute observation of natural life in a way which, though imaginative, always remained true to the character of the animals depicted.

These letters belong to the period between the purchase in 1905 of Hill Top Farm, at Sawrey in the Lake District, and her marriage some eight years later at the age of forty-seven to the country lawyer who assisted her in the purchase of it and other farm properties in the area. During this time she was at her most prolific and wrote some of her best work, most of it filled with local scenes and characters. Her method is well described in the letter of 8 January 1910, in which she also mentions her one involvement in politics. Convinced of the necessity of tariff reform after her unsuccessful attempts to have a 'Peter Rabbit' doll made in