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# **THE WILDERS OF NORTH CHINA**

## **Volume III of THE WILDER-STANLEY SAGA**

**Compiled and Edited by  
Donald Wilder Menzi**

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### **INTRODUCTION: China, the West, and the Wilders**

**For our Ancestors,  
and for Jane**

## EDITOR'S NOTE

The Wilder-Stanley Saga is told through the letters, memoirs and other writings of Theodore S. Wilder (Volume I), Charles Alfred Stanley (Volume II) and George and Gertrude Wilder (Volume III).

Volume I, Theodore S. Wilder's Civil War diary and his "History of Company C of the 7<sup>th</sup> Ohio Volunteer Infantry" – combined under the title, "The Praying Company" – is now complete and is available for downloading from the web-site, [d.menzi.org](http://d.menzi.org).

Volume II, Charles A. Stanley's letters written from 1862 to 1910 to his employer, the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions, is still being edited with the assistance of Charles Stanley's grandson, Bill Stanley.

Volume III, George and Gertrude Wilder's letters and papers, written from 1894 to 1960, are being made available as the editing process is completed, approximately a decade at a time.

Gertrude Wilder's watercolor paintings of the Weihsien concentration camp and the journey from China back to the US in 1943 are also available for viewing and downloading.

Sets of maps providing a geographical framework and detailed locations are provided for each time period.

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Donald Wilder Menzi, November, 2003

## **THE WILDER-STANLEY SAGA**

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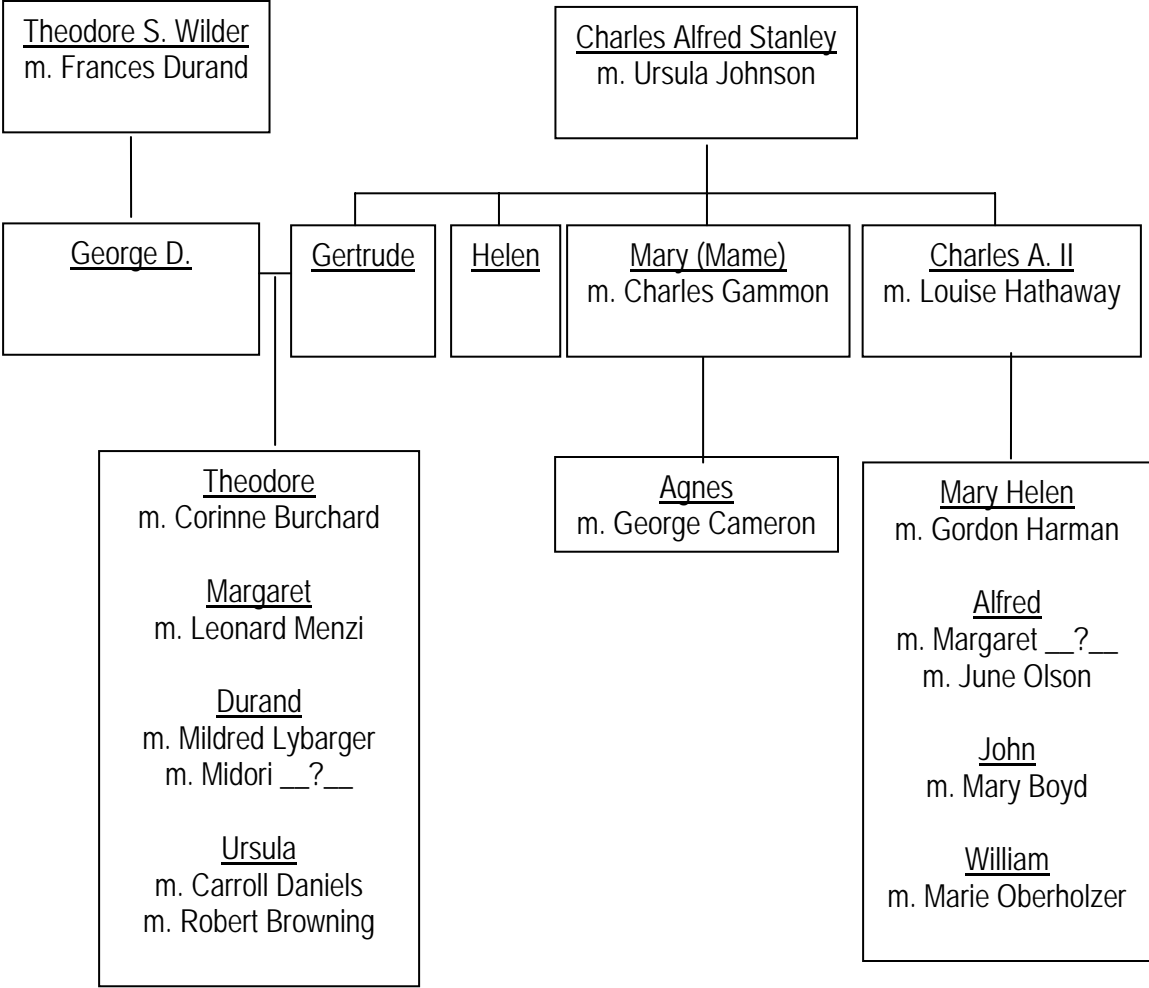
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## **INTRODUCTION: CHINA, THE WEST, AND THE WILDERS**

“The Wilders of North China” is the third of three volumes that make up *The Wilder-Stanley Saga*, a 90-year chronicle of turbulence and idealism, both in America and half a world away in China, as told in the letters, memoirs and other writings of two remarkable families.

The story begins in Ohio in 1861 when Theodore Smith Wilder, an Oberlin College student, along with over 80 fellow Oberlin students and alumni, answered President Lincoln’s call for volunteers to enlist in the army and fight to preserve the Union. While recovering from wounds received in the Battle of Cedar Mountain, Theodore Wilder wrote the official history of his unit, Company C of the Seventh Ohio Volunteer Infantry. Volume I of the Wilder-Stanley Saga combines his “History of Company C” with the diary he kept from the time of his enlistment until his discharge, under the title “The Praying Company,” a nickname that Company C’s members earned by their piety, which was matched only by their bravery in battle. Theodore Wilder lived long enough to graduate, marry his college classmate Frances Durand, and produce a son, George, in 1869 before succumbing to the after-effects of his war wound in 1871.

Volume II also begins in Ohio, with Charles Alfred Stanley and his bride, Ursula, preparing to sail for China in 1862. There, they will become one of the first American missionary families to arrive in North China following the 1860 Treaty of Tientsin, which marked the end of the infamous Opium Wars through which the British Empire forced China’s “opening” to the West. Over the next 47 years, until their retirement in 1909, Charles and Ursula Stanley would return to the U.S. only three times for year-long “furloughs,” raising four children in China while Charles shepherded a slowly growing flock of native Chinese Christians in Tientsin and nearby country villages. He would also write frequent, lengthy letters to his employer, the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions (“the American Board”), describing his many tribulations and occasional hard-won successes as a pioneer in the strange and sometimes hostile land that he came to call his home. These letters constitute Volume II of the Wilder-Stanley Saga.

The present volume, too, starts from Ohio, and provides the link between Volumes I and II when Theodore and Frances Wilder’s son, George, marries his college classmate, Charles and Ursula Stanley’s daughter, Gertrude, who had returned to Oberlin for her college education. Together in China, George and Gertrude Wilder experience famine, flood, rebellion, civil war, foreign invasion,

and imprisonment, all of which only serve to deepen their love for their adopted homeland and its people.

In order to understand more fully the events described in this volume of the century-long Wilder-Stanley saga, it is necessary to go back to the beginning of China's opening to the West.

## **Tea and Opium<sup>1</sup>**

By the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, Chinese civilization was already over 3,000 years old, having for much of this time been the most culturally advanced society on Earth. As Portuguese, Dutch and English merchant adventurers began to penetrate Chinese territory, their behavior only confirmed the traditional Chinese view of outsiders as crude barbarians, lacking the long history, ancient culture and refined Confucian philosophy that made for true civilization as the Chinese understood it.

To China's emperors, their "Central Kingdom" was self-sufficient and had no need for commerce with the West. The West, on the other hand, soon developed a great desire for many things Chinese, especially silk, porcelain and – most important – tea. By the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, tea had become the English national beverage and even the British government depended on the tea trade for its solvency, deriving a significant portion of its national revenue from the 100% import duty imposed on tea.<sup>2</sup>

Prior to 1776, Chinese tea was traded for cotton from British-ruled India and silver, mined in Mexico. When the American colonies' war for independence cut off Britain's access to Mexican silver, some other commodity had to be found to exchange for China's tea. The only product available to the British that the Chinese wanted to purchase in large enough quantities to keep the tea trade going was the highly addictive drug, opium.

Opium had been used by the Chinese for centuries as a medicine. When 18<sup>th</sup> Century Dutch traders introduced the Chinese to tobacco, they soon learned to mix it with opium, and smoke the "foreign mud." In 1835, almost 4 million pounds of opium, worth \$17 million to the traders, were unloaded in Canton, China. The best quality opium in the world was grown in Britain's colony, India, but American merchants from Boston and Salem, Mass., financed by New York

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<sup>1</sup> Historical material in the following pages is based on Frederic Wakeman, Jr., *The Fall of Imperial China*, Macmillan, New York, 1975.

<sup>2</sup> It was the British attempt to extend the English East India Company's monopoly on tea to the American colonies in 1773 that sparked the rebellion called the "Boston Tea Party," one of the events that led to the American Revolution.

bankers, developed their own sources of supply in the Middle East and profited greatly from the drug trade.

Recognizing the personal and social destruction being caused by widespread and growing opium addiction, the Chinese government had tried for years to prevent it, beginning with a prohibition against opium smoking in 1796. Finally, in 1839, the Emperor sent one of his most effective officials, Lin Tse-hsu, to eradicate the plague once and for all.<sup>3</sup> Lin's program included setting up special sanitariums to help opium users recover from their addiction, the arrest of Chinese drug dealers, a naval blockade of the port of Canton, and confiscation of the stocks of opium in the fortified warehouses on the Canton waterfront.

### **The “Unequal Treaties”**

The British were not about to give up so profitable a business as opium, however, and sent a fleet of war ships to force the Chinese to re-open the drug trade. China's military was no match for England's muskets, heavy artillery and paddlewheel gunboats, and in 1842 the Emperor was compelled to sign the Treaty of Nanking, the first of a series of “unequal treaties” imposed by Western powers. Among the concessions forced on the defeated Chinese were the cession of Hong Kong to the British and the opening of five “treaty ports” – most importantly, Shanghai – to foreign consuls, businessmen, and missionaries. A “most-favored nation” clause assured that all Western countries, including the U.S., would benefit equally from the concessions wrung from the Chinese by English “gunboat diplomacy.”

In 1856, not satisfied with the spoils of the Opium War, Britain again declared war on China, this time using the pretext that the Chinese had insulted British national honor by arresting a coastal pirate and hauling down the British flag that he had been flying illegally. They were joined by the French, who used the murder of a French missionary as their pretext for war. Once again, the Chinese were easily defeated. The British commander, Lord Elgin, decided to teach the Chinese a lesson they could not ignore. He ordered his troops to destroy one of China's greatest cultural treasures, the 200 beautiful pagodas and pleasure pavilions of the 10-square mile Summer Palace, after looting it of its most valuable items, some of which are still on display in the Victoria and Albert Museum in London.

In addition to the usual harsh financial penalties, the Treaty of Tientsin gave the Western powers 11 new treaty ports (including Tientsin itself), unlimited travel in the interior of China, residences for foreign envoys in Peking, the addition of more territory to Hong Kong, and the legalization of opium. A clause – surreptitiously inserted into the Chinese version of the Treaty, it is said, by the

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<sup>3</sup> A statue honoring Lin Tse-hsu was erected in New York City's Chinatown in 2003.

Catholic translator, Abbe Delamarre<sup>4</sup> -- guaranteed special protections for Christian missionaries.

It was this treaty that enabled Charles Stanley to sail for Tientsin with his bride Ursula in 1862.

### **The Empress Dowager Tzu Hsi**

Since the 17th Century, China had been ruled by members of the Ch'ing dynasty, originally a "barbarian" warrior clan that had invaded from Manchuria to the north and conquered the Ming dynasty in 1662. Over the centuries, the Ch'ing emperors and fellow Manchu tribesmen had assimilated to Chinese culture, but still retained a distinct identity as the empire's ruling elite. As a sign of their subservience, all Chinese men were required to shave the front of their heads and wear their hair in a Manchu-style queue, or "pig tail."

When the Ch'ing emperor Hsien Feng died in 1861, his heir and successor was only five years old, and for the next 15 years, China was ruled by regents, the ablest and most powerful of whom was the child-emperor's mother Tzu Hsi, the famed (or infamous) Empress Dowager. When the new emperor died in 1875, only two years after coming of age, Tzu Hsi was able to have her infant nephew, Kiang Hsu, named as his successor, thus extending her own rule for another 15 years, to 1889.

During this time, two factions struggled behind the scenes to dominate China's internal and foreign policies. The "self-strengthening" modernizers, who had concluded that it was necessary for China to learn new ways from the West in order to prevent further encroachments on its sovereignty, were opposed by a conservative faction who opposed reform of China's traditional education and civil service examination systems, believing that the Confucian classics were still the best guide to government policy. The Empress Dowager managed to balance these two factions against each other, encouraging self-strengthening military and industrial projects in the provinces while maintaining the traditional rituals and bureaucracy in the capital. Thus, neither faction was able to completely take over the apparatus of government, while she retained her own control of the balance of power between them.

### **Foreign Incursions and "Spheres of Influence"<sup>5</sup>**

From her quarters in the "Forbidden City" – the walled complex of ceremonial halls, government buildings, parks and residences at the heart of Peking – the Empress Dowager was forced to watch the ever-growing intrusion

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<sup>4</sup> See Juliet Bredon, *Peking: A Historical and Intimate Description*, p. 514.

<sup>5</sup> See Appendix A, Map 2.

of the Western powers on her realm, for it was not only the British who were eating away at China's national sovereignty. In the 1880s Russia seized hundreds of thousands of square miles of territory in the northwestern province of Sinkiang. China's defeat by the French in 1885 led to a treaty recognizing France's rule over China's former vassal-state Annam, (Vietnam). War with Japan, which broke out in 1894, just as George Wilder was preparing to depart for China, gave the Japanese control of China's island province of Taiwan and another former vassal state, Korea. The British followed up their "opening" of treaty ports after the Opium Wars by expanding their own "sphere of influence" around Shanghai, and built a fortified naval station at the port of Weihaiwei.

In addition to seizing or controlling China's best harbor ports, foreign powers were also beginning to gain control over China's inland territory, with its coal mines and mineral deposits, by financing the construction of railroads such as the Peking-Hankow line on which George Wilder accompanied the International Monetary Commission as translator in 1904. The western powers' gunboats also patrolled many of China's navigable rivers, using as an excuse the need to protect their own nations' growing number of Christian missionaries.

## **The Protestant Missionaries**

The first Protestant missionary to China, Robert Morrison, arrived in Macao in 1807.<sup>6</sup> Morrison, a representative of the English Congregationalists' London Missionary Society, settled in the southern province of Canton (Guangdong), where he remained until his death in 1834. The first "American Board"<sup>7</sup> missionary to China, Elijah C. Bridgman, arrived in Canton, in 1829, later moving north to Shanghai, where he died in 1861.<sup>8</sup> Henry Blodget, who came to Shanghai in 1854, accompanied the invading English and French armies northward to Tientsin in 1860, where he founded the first station of American Board's first North China Mission.

Between 1862 and 1890 the Congregational, Presbyterian, Methodist and other missionary societies established stations in a number of North China cities,

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<sup>6</sup> By then, the Roman Catholic Church had been sending missionaries to China, with mixed results, for centuries. First came the Franciscans (1294) then the Jesuits (1600), who adopted a successful strategy of accepting the Chinese practice of ancestor worship as not inconsistent with Christian theology. This approach was rejected by the Pope, and the Jesuits were replaced by their rivals, the Dominicans, who met with less success. Still, by 1900 Chinese Roman Catholics numbered over 500,000, compared with fewer than 100,000 converts to the various Protestant denominations.

<sup>7</sup> The "American Board" is the short name for the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions, the missionary arm of the American Congregational Church, now joined with three other Protestant denominations as the United Church of Christ.

<sup>8</sup> Not long after his death, Bridgman's widow, Laura, moved to Peking, where she later organized a school for girls (the Bridgman Academy).

using these centers to reach out to rural villages in the surrounding countryside. In addition to preaching the Christian gospel from city “street chapels” and at village fairs, they generally sought to introduce the Chinese to the benefits of “modern” Western civilization, establishing schools and hospitals as well as churches.

The Congregationalists’ American Board was known especially for its educational activities. Charles Stanley’s wife, Ursula, starting with a few orphan children, created the first school for girls anywhere in North China in Tientsin in 1863. The mission schools’ curricula typically included both the Chinese classics and Western subjects such as science, mathematics and geography, and enrolled both Christian and non-Christian students.

Virtually all of these educational and medical institutions are still operating today under Chinese government sponsorship. Those with which the Wilders were most closely associated – Bridgman Academy for Girls, Yuying Boys school, Yenching University, and Peking Union Medical College (“P.U.M.C.”) and Jefferson Academy in Tungchou – are now among China’s most highly regarded educational institutions<sup>9</sup>.

In addition to educational and medical work, the missionaries also worked against such social evils as opium addiction and the practice of hobbling women by binding their feet until they were barely able to walk, and taught health practices such as basic hygiene to people for whom this was a completely new idea.

Despite their good works, however, the missionaries were also the most visible and most vulnerable symbol of the Western powers’ incursions. As a result, both missionaries and Chinese Christians were often attacked and sometimes killed during periodic anti-foreign outbursts. These often coincided

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<sup>9</sup> Yu Ying Boys’ School, founded in 1864 and located in the American Board’s Peking mission compound – now known simply as Beijing Middle School #25 – has a teaching and administrative staff of over 200 and close to 2,400 students. Widely recognized in China as a leader in innovative educational programming, in 1996 the school became the first in China to be subsidized by the State but operated independently “by the local people.” Yu Ying’s sister school, Bridgman Academy, where Gertrude Wilder was Acting Principal for several years, is now Beijing Middle School #166. Jefferson Academy in Tungchou, now called Lu He High School, was designated in 2001 as a “model school in China” and recently published a 180-page collection of over 500 historical photographs chronicling its origins and history, with bilingual (Chinese and English) commentaries. Yenching University, where George Wilder taught and was a founding member of the Board of Managers, is now the suburban campus of Beijing University. The former Peking Union Medical College (P.U.M.C.), on whose Board George Wilder also sat, is now the Union Medical University of China, the country’s leading medical school. The Stanley Memorial School for Girls in Tientsin has also been incorporated into that city’s public school system.

with periods of extended drought or other calamities, which were often blamed by agitators on the presence of “foreign devils” in their midst. The most virulent and most famous of these anti-foreign and anti-missionary outbursts was the Boxer Rebellion of 1900.

### **North China and the “American Board”<sup>10</sup>**

The Wilders lived and worked exclusively in the region called “North China” – i.e., north of the Yangtze River, which joins the sea at the port of Shanghai. A chain of mountains divides North China into a relatively flat, fertile plain to the east, and a dry, mountainous plateau to the west. China’s capital, Peking, (now spelled Beijing) is located in the north not far from the historic region of Manchuria – the original home of the ruling Manchu dynasty, now an integral part of China. To the west lie the Western Hills, the beginnings of the great mountainous plateau beyond which lie the prairies of Mongolia. To the south are the provinces of Shantung (Mountain-East), China’s fertile bread-basket, and Shansi (Mountain-West), with coal and mineral riches, but little tillable land.

The Yellow River (Huang Ho) – cutting down from the north, then west across Shantung Province – while too shallow to be navigable, is subject to frequent flooding, leading to great destruction and loss of life; hence its nickname, “China’s sorrow.”

The American Board established a number of mission stations in North China, each of which served as a center for outreach to surrounding towns and villages.

- Tientsin (1860), China’s major northern port city was the first American Board mission in North China. Charles Stanley – Gertrude Wilder’s father – arrived there in 1862 and soon took over when the founder, Mr. Blodget, moved on to Peking in 1864. Charles Stanley remained in charge of the Tientsin mission and its outstations until his death in 1910. The next generation of Stanleys, Gertrude Wilder’s brother, Charles Stanley II (“Uncle Charlie” to the Wilders), was in charge of the Tientsin station from 1918 to 1928, assisted by his wife, “Aunt Louise.” Among his achievements there was the introduction of western poultry breeds (Rhode Island Reds and White Leghorns) to Chinese farmers.
- Peking (1864), as the capital city, was an obvious place for any missionary society to establish a center, and here the American Board worked closely with the Presbyterians, the Methodists, and

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<sup>10</sup> See Appendix A, Map 3.

the London Missionary Society (English Congregationalists). Eventually these main-line Protestant denominations combined forces to create several “Union” institutions, most notably Yenching University and the Peking Union Medical College (P.U.M.C.) as well as a “short-cut” seminary for non-college graduates, the Union Bible Training School, located in the Presbyterian compound at Ku Lou Hsi (Drum Tower West). The American Board compound at Teng Shih K’ou was the site of the Yu Ying Boys’ School and the Bridgman Academy for Girls, as well as a large church building seating over 1,000 that became a center for lectures, educational programs, and social services to the surrounding community. The Wilders lived in Peking from 1910 until 1926, when they moved to Tungchou. They returned to Peking to live and work in the College of Chinese Studies (formerly the North China Language School) after their official “retirement,” from 1939 to 1943.

- Kalgan (1865) was a trading center on the border between China and Mongolia, near the Great Wall, on the only caravan route between Peking and Urga (today’s Ulan Batur), capital of Mongolia. The Kalgan station was founded in 1864, when one of the American Board’s missionaries sought a location in the highlands for health reasons. Though Kalgan provided an opportunity for outreach to Mongolia, it was never highly successful as a mission outpost and was transferred by the American Board to the Methodists after 1911.
- Tungchou (also Tungchow or Tungcho) (1867) is located 13 miles east of Peking, where the emperor’s “tribute” rice<sup>11</sup>, carried north on the Grand Canal from the Yangtze valley was unloaded. For the American Board, Tungchou was both a center for outreach to village out-stations and a center for educational activities, including the North China College and Seminary (one of the constituents of Yenching University) Jefferson Academy and the North China American School, where the Wilders’ son-in-law, Leonard Menzi, served as Principal from 1922 to 1927. The Wilders lived in Tungchou from 1894 to 1910, and again from 1926 to 1931.
- Paotingfu, (Paoting or Paofu) (1873), the capital of Chihli province and a center for outreach to an area encompassing over 2 million people in Shantung and Chihli provinces, was led from 1913 on by George Wilder’s close friend and co-author with him of *Birds of Northeast China*, Hugh Hubbard. (In 1908, while employed by the YMCA in Tientsin, Hubbard had been the first to introduce

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<sup>11</sup> An annual tax on localities paid “in-kind” by rice-growing areas in the south.

basketball – now a favorite Chinese national pastime – to the Chinese.)

- Pangchuang (1880), unlike the other American Board missions, was not located in a city but in a country village, in the midst of several hundred other similar rural settlements. First visited by Charles Stanley in the 1870s, it remained an outstation of the Tientsin mission until 1880, when it was designated a station in its own right. From 1880 to 1905 the Pangchuan station was led by Arthur H. Smith (“Uncle Ming” to the Stanley’s children) who, with his wife Emma, adopted Chinese dress and lived as much as possible like native Chinese. Charles and Louise Stanley took over from the Smiths from 1905 to 1915, when the Pangchuang mission’s functions were relocated to the nearby but much larger city of Techow (Dezhou).
- Taiku (1882), and Fenchow (1885), in Shansi province were founded by the “Oberlin Band,” a group of Oberlin College and Seminary students who volunteered to the American Board to go to China together. By then, representatives of other mission societies were already established in Taiyuan, Shansi’s capital, which led to the choice of Taiku, one of the cities on the plain to the south. Fenchow was established as a separate station when two of the mission’s founders concluded that they could not work together in the same city. The Shansi stations, originally organized as a separate American Board mission, were later incorporated into a unified North China Mission organization.
- Lintsing or Lin Ching (1886) was located at the upper end of the Wei River, a western stretch of the Grand Canal, where freight and passenger ships were loaded and unloaded. Along with Kalgan, Lintsing remained one of the least productive of the American Board’s stations.
- Techow (1913), in Shantung province, became a center for medical work, as well as oversight of the country village stations originally associated with Pangchuang. The Wilders were re-assigned from Tungchou to Techou in 1931 and remained there until their official retirement in 1937.
- Tsinan (1918), capital of Shantung province, while not a traditional American Board mission station, was the home of Cheeloo University, a “union” institution similar to Yenching University in Peking. Gertrude Wilder’s brother, “Uncle Charlie” Stanley, was Dean of the University’s Theology School from 1928 on, also managing an agricultural research center and experimental farm

which helped introduce Shantung farmers to new varieties of seeds and other agricultural products.

## **Peking**

The Wilders moved from Tungchou to Peking in 1910, living first in the Presbyterian compound located near the Drum Tower on Kou Lu Hsi (Drum Tower West), and moving in 1917 to the American Board compound on Teng Shih Kou Street.

George Wilder's letters mention giving several talks on "The Geography of Peking." The following paragraphs were found on the back of the hand-written "Horse Story," a supplement to George Wilder's account of his journey on the Peking-Hankow Railroad as official translator for the International Monetary Commission.

"Peking consists of a Northern or Tartar City surrounded by a great wall and moat about four miles on each side; and a Southern, or Chinese City (see map, below). The three great gates on the south wall of the North City open into the South City which, being wider east and west than the North City, and only two miles from north to south, forms with it an inverted "T." The South City also has a lower wall and a moat.

"The North City wall is the outermost of three concentric squares. The next is an irregular square roughly two miles each way called the Imperial City, with an elegant but lesser, red wall topped with yellow tile, and a magnificent great gate tower on each side. Inside this is the Forbidden City, a citadel about a mile square, with a broad moat and a massive crenellated wall, with four great gate towers and four corner towers, all with imperial yellow<sup>12</sup> glazed tile roofs.

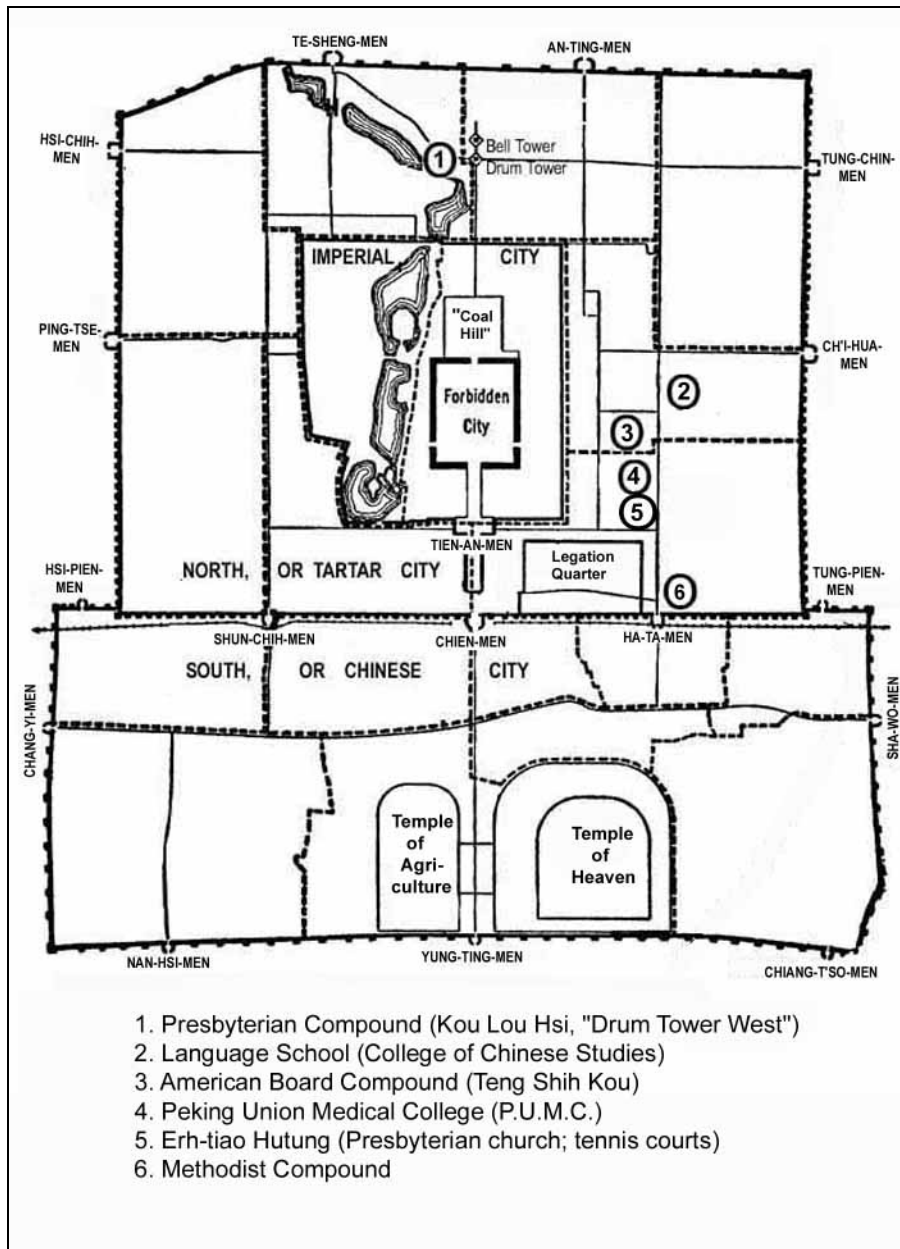
"Landscaping and architecture are the most highly developed arts in China and their highest expression is found in the City of Peking. Its plan is controlled by the laws of geomancy (i.e., Feng Shui). In harmony with its laws, the city is placed in the eye of a horseshoe of mountains 3,000 to 5,000 feet high, 15 to 30 miles away on the west, north and east sides. The cold, evil influences of the North are shunted off by the horseshoe, and the eastward-flowing rivers from the western mountains across the great China plain wash these evil influences away into the Sea. The horseshoe is open on the south to the sunny benign influences of the great plain of China. The landscaping and architecture not only of this city but of every city, every hamlet, every palace,

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<sup>12</sup> The use of the color yellow was restricted to official imperial buildings.

every home of the people, every cemetery, is governed by this law of wind and water. It is only common sense that sends one to the lee side of a sunny wall as a shelter from the cold north winds, and open to the warmth of the life-giving Sun.

### PEKING ADMINISTRATIVE DISTRICTS<sup>13</sup>



<sup>13</sup> Map adapted from Sidney D. Gamble, *Peking, A Social Survey*, (1921), p. 57.

“The throne of the Emperor, in the main Audience Hall, is at the center of the inner citadel. The approach to this throne is progressive in significance. On coming out of the farm land and from among the rural villages, out of the homes on the broad flat plain, to the central avenue axis of the two cities through the Yung Ting Gate in the middle of the Southern, or Chinese City, this avenue passes northward among the smaller shops and home industries of the common Chinese people to the great banks and emporiums of the silk and lacquer-ware merchants outside the Front Gate (Chien Men) of the North – or Tartar – City. Through this gate we enter the Tartar City, where only the Manchus and Tartars, the race that formerly ruled, were supposed to dwell, and on into the Imperial City, theoretically assigned to the nobility among the Manchus, and inside this, the central citadel, the Forbidden City, the home of the emperor and his entourage, immediate family and servants. It used to be said that there were about 2,000 of these. Here beyond the parade ground, lifted on three terraces, is the great Throne Hall with the throne at the center, where civil officials ranged down the right and military officers to the left.

“This was called the Forbidden City because it was unlawful for anyone not specially permitted by the Emperor to enter it. At the establishment of the Republic in 1911 this Forbidden City land, the formerly forbidden part of the Imperial City, was thrown open to be the pleasure grounds and amusement of the people. But long before that the irrepressible Chinese had pressed their way into the Imperial city and the Tartar City for their homes in a way that Genghis Khan of 1200 A.D. and the emperors of the late Ch’ing dynasty had probably not planned.”

## **The Wilder Family**

George Wilder was an athlete and outdoorsman, as well as a scholar, preacher and college professor. Ohio-born but reared on the South Dakota prairie, he loved nature and the out-of-doors. In college he was pitcher and captain of the baseball team and once described himself as someone who “would rather play baseball than eat.”

He was also a scientist at heart, having developed a life-long interest in ornithology in his youth when, as a volunteer reporter of bird migrations for the U.S. Department of Agriculture’s Bureau of Biological Survey, he began a life-long practice of recording every species of bird that he observed each day. Later in life he was recognized internationally by scholars in the field of ornithology, three species of birds having been named "*wilderi*" in honor of his having been

the first to identify them. He also became a student of apiculture (bee-keeping) when, on one of his four one-year furloughs to the U.S., he took the time to learn enough about it to enable him to train many Chinese in modern methods of bee-keeping. A book of historical photographs published in 2003 by Lu He High School (formerly Jefferson Academy) in Tungchou includes a picture of him – probably taken in the 1920s – with a group of Chinese pastors-in-training, pointing to a row of bee hives, with the caption, “This is the way to teach how to raise bees.”

Religiously, George Wilder’s thinking evolved over time. He began his ministry in 1894 as a proponent of evangelical Christianity, viewing the church’s role in China as bringing the Christian gospel to individual Chinese, replacing selfishness with altruism and providing them with the inner motivation that would enable them to live up to their own Confucian ethical ideals. By the 1920s, however, he had become an advocate of the “social gospel,” which saw the role of the church as helping to improve the Chinese people’s lives through its members’ selfless service to those in need, inspired by the example of Jesus’ ministry to the poor and downtrodden.

He was not, however, a stereotypical “do-gooder,” at one point musing that the world would be better off if there was less “doing for others,” and more simply working together with others for the common good. He also developed great respect for the positive aspects of Chinese civilization, including the high value placed on education, respect for parents and family, the ethical philosophy of Confucius, and what he once described as the Chinese people’s seemingly innate ability to get along peaceably with all, and to retain good will and mutual respect in the most delicate situations.<sup>14</sup>

Charles and Ursula Stanley’s China-born daughter, Gertrude, in addition to being a life-long companion to her husband, was also a teacher and an accomplished amateur artist.<sup>15</sup> Her letters, which provide us with a great deal of “social history” of their time, are written mostly to their children during the Wilders’ later years in China.

We also get to know the Wilders’ four children, born in China but sent to the U.S. for their post-elementary school education. Theodore, born in 1897, grows into the family all-star – class president, Phi Beta Kappa, Rhodes Scholar, medical doctor. The gentle Margaret (1898) overcomes her fearfulness to

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<sup>14</sup> From “The Things Needed for Our Peace,” an address delivered to the Pilgrim Church, Cleveland, in 1944.

<sup>15</sup> Included among the Wilders’ papers are a set of 22 watercolors painted in 1943 during their internment by the Japanese in 1943, a dozen sketches painted on their repatriation voyage from Shanghai to New York, and a collection of more than 100 wildflower paintings.

become a tireless organizer against U.S. economic support for Japanese military aggression against China. Durand (1900), a friend to all, is a constant worry to his parents as he struggles to find his way in the world. Ursula (1902), pretty and athletic, the first graduate of the North China American School, eventually publishes her own memoir of growing up in China, *The Willow Wand*.

Other family members – George’s mother, Frances and her sister Lynella (“Aunt Ella”), Gertrude’s brother Charles and his wife, Louise (“Uncle Charlie” and “Aunt Louise”), her sister, Mary (“Aunt Mame”), her brother-in-law Charles Gammon and their daughter Agnes – appear from time to time in their letters.

### **George Wilder’s China**

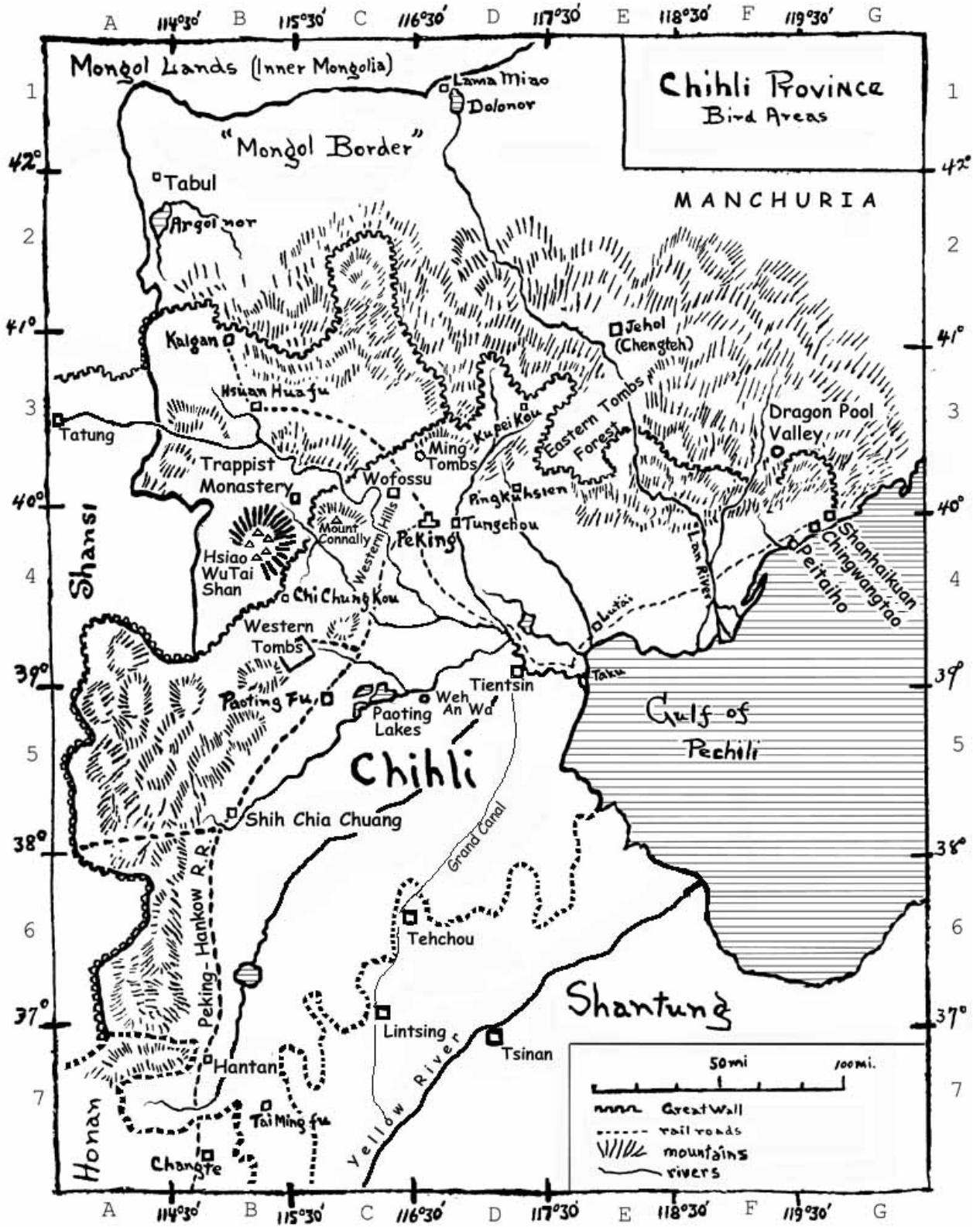
George Wilder’s China extended far beyond the boundaries of the cities in which he lived and worked. A lover of the out-doors from his youth on the Dakota prairie – hiking, camping and hunting, sometimes for game, but especially for the birds he needed as specimens to document their migration patterns -- he was known as someone who had “been everywhere” in China. His own hand-drawn map of “Bird Areas” in Chihli Province (below, p. 24) shows us some of the places that were familiar to him from his birding expeditions and other activities.

#### Map Area      Description

- 2-A    Tabul – A Mongol village beyond the Great Wall where, during a three-week camping trip with the Ingram family in 1917, the Wilders were (erroneously) reported to be besieged by the bandits and bands of rebellious soldiers who were active in the area at that time.
  
- 3-C    Trappist Monastery – A favorite destination for mule-pack camping trips, described in words and photos by Leonard Menzi in 1923.
  
- “        Wofossu – A Buddhist temple in the Western Hills noted for an enormous statue of the sleeping Buddha, rented by the YMCA as a conference center, to which GDW was often invited to speak.
  
- 3-E    Eastern Tombs forest – Burial place for five Ching Dynasty emperors, formerly a protected sanctuary for wild game, mostly destroyed to create farmland for destitute Manchus left without support after the fall of the Ching empire in 1911.
  
- 3-G    Dragon Pool valley – a beautiful but well-hidden camping place surrounded by three peaks – “North Heaven,” “East Heaven” and “Buddha’s Tooth” – described by GDW in August 1916 and 1919 letters.

- 4-B Hsiao Wu Tai Shan – “Little” Wu Tai Shan, a five-peaked mountain, the highest point in Chihli province (7,779 ft.), called “little” to distinguish it from the more prominent Wu Tai Shan (also five-peaked) in Shanxi province. See George Wilder and Leonard Menzi’s detailed description of their 1923 trip to the five peaks and the Trappist Monastery to the north.
- “ Chi Chung Kou – A camping place with a dramatic gorge, on the route to Hsiao Wu Tai Shan.
- 4-C The Western Hills – The range of mountains and foothills west of Peking, an area filled with old temples, many of which were rented by Beijing-area missionaries and others for summer vacations.
- “ “Lost Tribe Country” (not shown on map) – An isolated valley between Hsiao Wu Tai Shan on the west and Mt. Connally on the east, where rebels from the Ming Dynasty were granted a sanctuary after they surrendered to the invading Manchus in the mid-1600s. Visited several times by GDW on the way to or from Hsiao Wu Tai Shan or the Trappist Monastery.
- 4C- to 7-B Peking-Hankow Railway – Route of the International Monetary Commission, for which GDW served as official interpreter in 1904, which he described in a series of articles in the Peking Gazette.
- 4-G Peitaiho – Seaside summer resort where the Stanleys and Wilders both owned cottages. Peitaiho, also a major transit point for migrating birds, was the subject of a book by the Danish bird-man Axel Hemmingsen which was dedicated “to the memory of Rev. George Durand Wilder, D.D., outstanding North China ornithologist.”
- 5-C Paoting Lakes and Wen An Wa – A region of lakes, marshes and wetlands where Wilder and Hubbard hunted waterfowl for their collections.
- 7-B Hantan – The main center for distributing grain to the 11-county Tai Ming district, under GDW’s supervision during the great famine of 1921.

# George Wilder's China



Off the map, but illustrative of the breadth of George Wilder's interests and activities:

- Hsuchou (modern Xuzhou), 170 miles south of Tsinan, where he spent two summers (1924, 1925) collecting hamsters, rats and mice for a Rockefeller Foundation-funded research project on kalaazar, a disease transmitted to humans through sand-flies, lice and other parasites.
- Saratsi, Inner Mongolia, 250 miles west of Kalgan, "a wild frontier area," where he filled in as interim field manager in charge of constructing an irrigation canal financed by the International Famine Relief Commission (1931).
- Ho Shun hsien (Heshun), a picturesque, bowl-shaped valley 70 mi. SW of Shih Chia Chuang, where Wilder, Hubbard and friends went to hunt wild boar and other game (1932).
- Harbin, Manchuria, 500 mi. NE of Shanhaikuan, the base for an attempt led by Wilder and others to establish a Red Cross-sponsored colony of farmers displaced by the floods of 1917, which was aborted because of repeated attacks by bandits on the first group of settlers.

## The Wilder Papers

Fortunately, a great many of George and Gertrude Wilder's letters and other writings have been preserved, some in the archives of the "American Board" and some in the private collections of their children. "The Wilders of North China" recreates George and Gertrude Wilders' lives in their own words, which tell us about the events in their lives as they actually occurred, also providing us glimpse of many aspects of "social history" – the food, games, and other customs of the times. Those who take the time to read them – ideally in the order in which they were written – will come to know two extraordinary individuals, and find themselves participating with them in the story of China's struggle to emerge intact into the turbulent world of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

In addition to the Wilders' letters, we also have two books – *Analysis of Chinese Characters*, first published in 1922 and still in print and available in a 1985 Dover edition, and of *Birds of Northeastern China* (1936), a few copies of which are in the hands of family members.

George Wilder also edited the Fifth Edition of *Fenn's Chinese-English Pocket Dictionary*, the American edition of which was published by Harvard University Press in 1942.

To these should be added an unpublished translation of a two-volume collection of poems composed in the early 1930s by the warlord general Feng Yu Hsiang to accompany a series of 240 pen-and-ink drawings of country village life by the artist Chao Wang-yun.

The letters of Charles and Ursula Stanley, the generation which preceded the Wilders to China, are also being edited and will eventually join the Wilder Papers in presenting a century-long window on life in China, as experienced by two generations of the extended Wilder-Stanley family.

### **Acknowledgments and Sources of Documents**

George and Gertrude Wilder's letters and papers have been assembled from several locations.

The American Board's official archives, including letters from missionaries in the field, are preserved in Harvard University's Houghton Library. In addition, microfilm copies of the Stanleys and Wilders' letters to the Board were made available by David Stowe, of the Global Ministries division of the United Church of Christ (formerly the Congregational Church).

Most of the Wilders' letters to family members were donated by their daughter, Margaret Menzi and their son, Theodore, to the Bentley Historical Library of the University of Michigan, which provided photocopies from its files. Some additional personal correspondence remains in the possession of the Wilders' granddaughter, Betty Menzi,, who was responsible for preserving and organizing the hundreds of letters in her mother's collection.

The Oberlin College Archives and the Yale Divinity School Library also provided copies of some of the Wilders' papers.

George Wilder's field notes on bird migration are preserved in Cornell University Library's, Dept. of Manuscripts and University Archives.

The following web sites include reference material on George Wilder:

Guide to the George Durand Wilder Papers  
[rnc.library.cornell.edu/EAD/htmldocs/](http://rnc.library.cornell.edu/EAD/htmldocs/)

Ricci Roundtable on the History of Christianity in China  
[ricci.rt.usfca.edu/biography](http://ricci.rt.usfca.edu/biography)

Michigan Women's Diaries  
[www.umich.edu/~bhl/bhl/mhchome/women/diarym.htm](http://www.umich.edu/~bhl/bhl/mhchome/women/diarym.htm)

## A Glossary of Chinese Terms<sup>16</sup>

The following Chinese terms are generally left un-translated in the Wilder letters.

*catty* – a unit of weight; about 1.5 lbs.

*chien* – room, as in a “four-*chien* house.” In traditional Chinese houses, rooms were generally arranged in a line, with only one outer entrance. According to Chinese custom, the most important and respected persons, who included grandparents or parents, lived in the farthest east room, and the youngest in the west room

*-chou*, *-chow* or *-cho* – a suffix identifying a town as the center of an administrative district, within a county (*hsien*).

*-fu* – a suffix identifying a city as a provincial capital or a district center with authority over multiple counties. (See *-hsien*)

*-fang* – a suffix indicating the center of a local administrative district.

*godown* - a storage place or warehouse; a term used in both India and East Asia.

*-hsien* – an administrative district, similar to a county in the U.S.

*hutung* – a street, lane or alley.

*kao liang* – sorghum, a field crop, generally fed to animals.

*li* – a measure of distance; about 1/3 mile.

*likin* – a transit tax imposed on articles of trade that are passing through a province.

*men* – gate, as in Tien-an-men (Gate of Heavenly Peace), south of the Forbidden City, at the northern end of Tienanmen Square.

*mou* or *mu* – a measure of land area, equal to about 1/6 acre.

*mushih* – pastor (*mu* cattle, sheep + *shih* experienced, teacher): “pastor-teacher.”

*pailou* – a decorative or monumental gateway having three or more sections, the central one higher than the others.

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<sup>16</sup> Compiled with the assistance of “Erie” Zhou Bao, the English language teacher at Beijing Middle school #25, formerly Yu Ying Boys’ School.

*paiwo* – a quilt.

*sycee* – un-coined silver, in lumps of various sizes, usually bearing a banker's or assayer's stamp or mark, used in Imperial-era China as a medium of exchange. [Literally, "fine silk," because it can be made into wire as fine as silk thread.]

*tael* – a unit of weight, usually referring to an amount of silver. In 1904 the money value of one *tael* of standard silver was approximately \$1.40 (gold).

*tai tai* – "old old," the affectionate designation of an older woman. Gertrude Wilder was called "Wan tai tai."

*tao tai* – a high provincial official, such as a vice-governor.

*tuchun* – the military governor of a province; "warlord."

*yamen* – the residence and office of a public official in the Chinese Empire (*ya* office + *men* gate).