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Contact Weston Blelock

Tel: 845-679-8111

Email: wblelock@woodstockarts.com

## *Under the North Light*

Petersham Bio With Foreword by the Steads Set to Debut on November 15, 2012

Woodstock, NY—July 17, 2012—*Under the North Light: The Life and Work of Maud and Miska Petersham* by Lawrence Webster, will launch on November 15, 2012. This lively, full-color biography of the Petershams chronicles the remarkable lives of two of the most pivotal figures in the history of American children's book publishing. It includes a foreword written by Philip C. and Erin E. Stead, winners of the 2011 Caldecott Medal for *A Sick Day for Amos McGee*. The Petersham bio will serve as a companion volume to the forthcoming retrospective Petersham exhibition at the Woodstock Artists Association & Museum that is scheduled to open on October 6. Other possible show destinations include the de Grummond Children's Literature Museum in Hattiesburg, MS, the Hungarian Cultural Center in New York, NY and the Eric Carle Museum in Amherst, MA.

Lawrence Webster, a librarian and nonprofit consultant, knew the Petershams while she was growing up in Woodstock during the 1950s and 1960s, and she has always loved and admired their books and the lives they led. With the full cooperation of the Petersham family she has written an evocative book about the surprising and enduring partnership of Maud and Miska Petersham. It is sure to intrigue anyone who is interested in the integration of life and work, values and livelihood. Maud, with deep Yankee roots, graduated from Vassar in 1912. Miska, born in Hungary, studied at the National School for Applied Arts in Budapest and immigrated to New York City in 1912. The two met at an advertising agency and married in 1917. By 1920 they moved to Woodstock.

Pioneers in a golden age of children's book publishing in America, the Petershams were among a handful of people who set the direction for illustrated children's books as we know them today. They worked closely with such legendary editors as Louise Seaman and May Masee, and such inventive printers as Charles Stringer and William Glaser—greatly advancing the art of illustrated children's book. Under their studio's north light they produced more than 100 books, as illustrators or as author/illustrators, during a career that spanned five decades.

Theirs was a deep collaboration of complementary backgrounds and temperaments, and a marriage that created a warm and welcoming household. Their books were immensely popular with children, but also admired by critics, librarians and tastemakers. In the time before the first Caldecott Medal, their contributions were

recognized by the American Institute of Graphic Arts (AIGA). Four of their books were selected to be shown at the highly competitive AIGA exhibitions in the late 1920s and early 1930s. During the 1940s the Petershams won a Caldecott Honor (in 1942 for *An American ABC*) and a Caldecott Medal (in 1946 for *The Rooster Crows*).

The 192-page book is in full color and includes 202 rare and vintage color and black and white images documenting their lives, work and books.

Grace Worcester Greene, Youth Services Consultant, Vermont Department of Libraries has this to say about the forthcoming title:

*The Petershams' books have always been important to me: I loved The Rooster Crows when I was very young, I often used The Circus Baby in story-time when I was a young children's librarian, and of course I knew about a number of others. But not until I read this stunningly beautiful and thoroughly researched book did I have any idea of the depth and breadth of their work, or of how important and influential they were in the early days of children's books in America. Webster has made an important contribution to the history of children's literature.*

Dr. Samantha K. Hastings, Director, School of Library and Information Science, University of South Carolina, writes,

*This beautifully written history of young talent, love and lives filled with creative joy, could just as easily be contemporary as early twentieth century. The research is excellent; fact and fancy combine in the image of Maud and Miska's work. This is a must-read for anyone in love with art and literature!*

Thomas E. Hill, Art Librarian, Vassar College, adds,

*Under the North Light is an ardent and beautifully produced tribute to two of the early twentieth century's most important children's book illustrators. The Petershams' pioneering work with The Poppy Seed Cakes, Miki and Get-A-Way and Hány János introduced a new level of craftsmanship to the modern children's picture book, and focused attention on internationalist and folk themes. This book is a must for all who are interested in the evolution of children's book publishing in this country.*

#### About Lawrence Webster

Lawrence Webster grew up in Woodstock, NY and was a neighbor to the Petershams. She knew Miska and Maud Petersham, and was a close friend of their granddaughter, Mary. Webster has a Masters in library science from SUNY Albany and had short stints in radio and publishing. In the latter she worked at See-Saw Book Club for Scholastic in the late 60s. Two previous books are *Robber Raccoon*, using the pen name of Thomas Lawrence, for Grosset & Dunlap, 1971 and *Catch your Breath: A Book of Shivery Poems*.

The latter was co-compiled with Lilian Moore and illustrated by Gahan Wilson for Garrard in 1973. Webster is a librarian and non-profit consultant, and she has written numerous library-related articles.

### About WoodstockArts

WoodstockArts is a publishing and production company based in Woodstock, NY. As a publisher it specializes in books about the art and the artists of Woodstock. A recent title, *Woodstock History and Hearsay*, is an award-winning history of the town. In 2009 the firm published *Roots of the 1969 Woodstock Festival: The Backstory to "Woodstock,"* with a foreword by Bob Fass. Forthcoming titles include a memoir on Georges Malkine. As producers the company's principals have worked on a number of local projects including staging a guitar sculpture auction in conjunction with Sotheby's/eBay in 2002 for the town's Byrdcliffe Art Colony centennial celebration; a Roots of '69 Woodstock Festival Concert in 2009; and an Experience Woodstock Card cultural tourism program with the Woodstock Chamber of Commerce & Arts from 2010 to the present.