A Glimpse of Columbia History...

King George VI and Queen Elizabeth of England descend the steps of Low Library during their visit on Saturday, June 10, 1939.

Columbia Community Celebrates Four MacArthur ‘Genius Awards’

By Kristin Sterling and Michael Larkin

As the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation celebrates its 25th year of grantmaking, four members of the Columbia community have been bestowed the honor of the MacArthur Fellow, also known as a “Genius Award.” They include: Pedro Sanchez, director of tropical agriculture at the Earth Institute and 2002 World Food Prize recipient; Sarah Sze, a citizen of the United States, who was born in Cuba; Anders Winroth, GSAS ’96, and Lydia Davis, Barnard ’70.

“I am extremely honored to have been named a MacArthur Fellow, and will work doubly hard to research every avenue, expend every effort and develop every mean to alleviate global hunger,” said Sanchez, a citizen of the United States, who was born in Cuba.

Sanchez is a soil scientist whose practical and economical solutions to problems in land productivity in developing countries have established him as a leader in tropical agriculture at the Earth Institute and 2002 World Food Prize recipient. Sanchez advances the use of ordinary objects to create strikingly original sculptures and site-specific installations. She transforms everyday objects such as plastic plants, candies and small desk fans into gravity defying works in horizontal and tower-like formations. Her work at Columbia is currently on display at the Walach Art Gallery through Dec. 13 in an exhibition entitled “Reflection: Seven Years in Print – The LeRoy Neiman Center for Print Studies.”

Anders Winroth received a Ph.D. in history from the Graduate School of Arts and Sciences (GSAS) in 1996. He has done extensive research tracing the development of medieval canon law, raising new questions about the history of law and modern legal reasoning. His work on Gratian’s Decretum, a 12th century collection of church law, and the first scholastic canon law textbook produced startling discoveries.

Currently an associate professor of medieval history at Yale, Winroth’s The Making of Gratian’s Decretum, published in 2000, opened new avenues for interpreting the origins and development of Gratian’s medieval texts. Decretum is considered a seminal book of European history and a basis for the development of Western law from the medieval to the present.

Winroth also is the co-editor, together with Columbia associate professor of history Adam Kosto, of Charters, Cartularies, and Archives: The Preservation and Transmission of Documents in the Medieval West (2002).

Finally, Barnard alumna Lydia Davis is the author of inventive, witty and very short works of prose about life’s ordinary moments, teaches at the State University of New York, Albany, and is a celebrated translator of important works of French literature. Davis has written three collections of short stories and a novel. Her most recent book, Samuel Johnson is Indignant (2001), consists of 57 short, sharp meditations on life, language and such miscellaneous topics as lawns, funeral homes and jury duty.

Each MacArthur Fellow will receive $500,000 over the next five years to be used in an area of their choosing. Since its inception in 1981, 659 people, ranging in age from 18 to 82, have received these awards.

The 2003 recipients join 19 other Columbians who have been named MacArthur Fellows over the past two decades, more recently including: Caroline Walker Bymum, Barbara Fields, Edward Hirsch, Richard Howard, Sherry Ortner, Kara Walker and Patricia Williams.