

TRUSTEES OF THE PUBLIC LIBRARY OF THE CITY OF BOSTON

**Meeting of the Trustees Special Collections Committee
Thursday, February 11, 2016 at 8:30 a.m.
Commonwealth Salon
Central Library, Copley Square
700 Boylston Street, Boston, MA**

MINUTES

A meeting of the Boston Public Library Trustees Special Collections Committee was held at the Boston Public Library, Commonwealth Salon, Central Library, Copley Square, 700 Boylston Street, Boston, MA on Thursday, February 11, 2016 at 8:30 a.m.

Present at the meeting were: Committee Chair William Stoneman, and Committee Members: Mr. Brian Clancy, Mr. Stanley Cushing, Mr. Michael Ewald, Mr. Jarvis Kellogg, Ms. Cheryl Nixon, Rep. Byron Rushing, Ms. Vivian Spiro, and BPL Interim President, Mr. David Leonard. Also in attendance: BPL staff members Ms. Laura Irscher, Ms. Beth Prindle, Mr. Jay Moschella, and Ms. Deborah Kirrane. Absent from the meeting were Committee Members: Ms. Mary Pfeifer Lentz, Ms. Susan Abbott, Ms. Barbara Glauber, Ms. Lillie Johnson, and Ms. Brenda Lawson.

Special Collections Committee Chair William Stoneman presided, and the meeting was called to order at 8:40 a.m. Mr. Stoneman confirmed that a quorum was present and asked if members had comments regarding the Minutes of the May 7, 2015 meeting or the Notes of the October 13, 2015 meeting. Mr. Clancy confirmed changes he had made with the Clerk and, upon motion made and duly seconded, the Minutes of the May 7, 2015 meeting were approved. As the October 13, 2015 meeting did not produce a quorum, the notes produced will serve to provide a record of the proceeding.

Interim President David Leonard offered a brief update on the BPL President Search Process. The Search Committee has released a job description and will soon be moving to the interview phase of the process. Mr. Leonard also reported on positive and significant recent press coverage: television show Chronicle covered the BPL generally and WBUR and NPR produced a report on the Chavannes mural restoration. The mural has been removed from the wall and restoration work by Gianfranco Pocobene and his mentor, Ian Hodgkins, has begun. The process is unprecedented and exciting but not without trepidation. Global priorities for the BPL include completion of the Central Library Renovation and re-opening of the Johnson Building in summer 2016, on time and on budget.

Mr. Leonard announced that Beth Prindle is now the permanent Head of BPL Special Collections. Ms. Prindle's appointment will bring additional stability and a valued skill set to the collections area. The BPL will continue to seek additional expertise for specific collection areas, but hiring for those positions is contingent upon appropriate funding. As such, the BPL continues to work with City of Boston, Foundation, and Associates colleagues to determine how to best align identified needs.

In response to a question about the President search, Mr. Leonard responded the Search Firm is managing the selection process under its Chair, John Palfrey, and the committee continues to report to the Trustees. While the Search Committee hopes to have a new President in place in May timeframe, it may be longer given possible relocation and notice issues. Ms. Spiro, who serves as a member of the Search Committee added that the job description is very complex and, contrary to popular belief, the President does not need to be a librarian, provided a chief librarian is appointed. She believes the President should have extraordinary diplomatic and managerial skills, and suggested people contact John Palfrey if they would like to suggest candidates.

Laura Irmischer, Chief of Collections Strategy, reminded the Committee that at its last meeting, Norman B. Leventhal Map Center Executive Director, Jan Spitz, reported that Curator Ron Grim had discovered a stolen map, belonging to the Map Center, in a catalog. Ms. Irmischer reported that the map has been returned to the BPL and is on display. Ms. Irmischer thanked Mr. Grim and his staff for their efforts to return the map to its proper home. Mr. Leonard pointed to the contributions of digital and curatorial watchfulness.

As reported by Ms. Prindle, the BPL holds a copy of the *Audubon Birds of America*, as well as a duplicate copy of volume I of the four volume set. About five years ago, the Special Collections Committee discussed the Audubon collection as it was believed the sets were incomplete. The “Appleton Copy,” was missing two plates. In 2011 Brian and Susan Clancy helped secure one of these plates – the Great Horned Owl, but the Swallow-tailed Kite was still understood to be missing. Because of the extensive inventory efforts currently underway, BPL Rare Books Department has confirmed that the BPL does possess the Swallow-tailed Kite. This means that the BPL holds a complete *Audubon Birds of America* (435 plates), a complete volume I (100 plates), and 8 additional duplicate plates. Ms. Prindle recognized the success and power of the ongoing inventory and commended all staff involved. She thanked the Associates of the Boston Public Library, for funding the full conservation of Appleton copy volume III. Paper conservation efforts are being performed to stabilize the set and house it in such a way that it may be digitized and displayed. While the Swallow Tail Kite may have originated from a source other than the Appleton copy, having it completes the copy.

Ms. Prindle explained that “elephant sheets” measure 29” x 39” and, accordingly, are difficult to bind. 100 plates weight 50 pounds. Having the plates disbound allows them to be flat, provides greater stability, allows for side-by-side usage when researching and provides for easier exhibition usage.

Ms. Irmischer presented the Rare Books Department Update. After being closed for two months for purposes of cleaning of the entire collection, the department is now open to the public but will, however, soon close for one additional week to replace carpeting. Rare Books continues to work as a team, together with City colleagues, to address the HVAC system and environmental controls and ensure a stable environment before warm weather and humidity arrive. An interim environmental control system is being implemented for spring 2016, and a permanent climate control system will be in place for fall 2016.

In her update on the Print Department Inventory, Ms. Irmischer reminded the Committee that the department has been closed since June 2015 for purposes of conducting an inventory. Dr. Martha Mahard continues to lead a team of 20 Simmons College interns in this effort. Teams of six to seven interns work daily sorting through boxes and viewing items that have not been looked at in decades, and The Associates of the Boston Public Library (“The Associates”) have been hosting cultivation events in which prints are displayed to invited guests. The inventory is currently 50% completed and will continue through December 2016. While the original timeline indicated the inventory would be 90% complete by March 2016, based on the experience of the inventory team, a projection of 90% by November or December 2016 is more realistic.

Ms. Irmischer described visits made by Ms. Prindle and her to peer institutions to learn and share experiences. Visits were made to New York Public Library, Yale University, The Athenaeum, and Mass Historical Society. Messes. Irmischer and Prindle enjoyed seeing what others were doing, hearing about challenges faced by other institutions, and recognizing that challenges BPL faces are faced by other institutions. Connections are being made with other institutions for outreach and education regarding best practices. Ms. Prindle and Ms. Irmischer will soon visit the Northeastern Document Conservation Center to view resources for conservation and long-term document preservation. Based on these visits, when something strikes, BPL staff can reach out to a cohort of peer institutions ready to assist. On all visits, other institutions acknowledged what the BPL has experienced is not unique and Ms. Prindle pointed to the support and respect others have for the BPL.

Mr. Leonard thanked Committee member and Trustee Rep. Byron Rushing for encouraging the BPL to make visiting peer institutions as part of dealing with last year’s challenges a priority. Rep. Rushing responded that this needs to be reported to Trustees and others.

Mr. Stoneman commented on the importance of professional development of staff. The BPL needs to encourage its staff to join professional organizations, take advantage of training opportunities, and thus develop greater awareness of developments in this field. Investing funding in staff development is vitally important. Ms. Prindle described “Rare Books School” that staff attended through funding by The Associates.

Ms. Prindle introduced Jay Moschella, Rare Books Cataloger to discuss Shakespeare Anniversary Exhibition and Related Events. Mr. Moschella has been an employee of the BPL for almost two years. His position is funded through The Associates, and he has shown a remarkable faculty for cataloging complex materials. By way of background: 2016 marks the 400th anniversary of Shakespeare’s death, an event that will be commemorated nationally, internationally, and at the Boston Public Library.

Mr. Moschella stated the BPL would be commemorating Shakespeare’s death by mounting an exhibition of the BPL’s own holdings, an exhibition that would educate the public of the unprecedented richness of the BPL’s collection in an interesting way. The exhibition will explore the mediation of Shakespeare and his works. It will look at the way works have been altered and changed by printers, editors, actors, and the world of Shakespeare as it relates to forgery. Mr. Moschella is working on selecting 60-70 items for the exhibition from the BPL’s approximately 15,000 item collection – one of the greatest in the world. The BPL’s Shakespeare

collection was one of the first major collections in the United States. It has since been eclipsed, but remains unprecedented in terms of its richness. The exhibition will highlight the accessibility of the items and the importance of rare books generally. Mr. Moschella is receiving guidance from an academic advisory board of which Zack Lester (University of Pennsylvania), John Overhold (Houghton Library), and Mark Sidmore (Actors Shakespeare Project) are members. The first folio will be a main featured item and very early editions of individual plays, including a first edition of *A Midsummer's Night Dream* and *Hamlet*. The exhibition will provide the BPL an amazing opportunity to showcase items that no one else has.

An additional goal of the exhibition is to also talk about the BPL's collection overall and get people excited about it. BPL is working with CNG Partners to present a strong visual impact and exciting ways for people to participate. The public opening is scheduled for October 13 and the exhibition will run through March 31, 2017. It is made possible through the work of Associate-funded staff positions and a major gift from Iron Mountain who is underwriting the cost of this museum-level exhibition. Timing of the exhibition was based upon the summer 2016 completion of the Central Library renovations. A pamphlet will be published but there will not be an exhibition catalog, and much of the information will be shared via an online component. Mr. Stoneman suggested advertising the exhibition to public schools and high schools so classroom teachers could supplement curriculum with items in the exhibition.

Ms. Prindle thanked Ms. Spiro and The Associates for their valuable assistance and Ms. Spiro commended Mr. Moschella on his efforts and talent. Mr. Leonard thanked Iron Mountain and described their funding of this exhibition as a sign the community at large has faith in the BPL and is confident the institution is moving in the right direction.

Ms. Prindle next introduced two pending loan requests for recommendation by the Special Collections Committee to the Boston Public Library Board of Trustees for the Board's approval. The request is for 36 items to be displayed as part of the exhibition *Beyond Words: Illuminated Manuscripts from Boston-area Collections*, at The McMullen Museum of Art at Boston College ("McMullen."), The Houghton Library at Harvard University ("Houghton"), and at the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum ("ISGM").

The exhibition is an attempt to gather medieval and renaissance manuscripts from Boston-area collections. Eighteen institutions are contributing material and, if the pending request is approved, the BPL will be the largest single lender after Houghton. The exhibition will be at three locations: McMullen, Houghton, and ISGM. A 600-page catalog of 80 contributing editors will be published to coincide with the exhibition and the exhibition will contain over 250 objects. The exhibition is unique in that institutions are coming together to display collections, and it is hoped this will be the beginning of future collaborative exhibitions. Other institutions involved include, Tufts University, Brandeis, Wellesley, The Athenaeum, and the Armenian Museum of Watertown. The exhibition will include a series of public programs and a three-day symposium. Pro bono appraisals of all items requested were conducted and appraisers were impressed by what they saw at the BPL, noting the quality and excellent condition of the collection. The exhibition will have a unified website across the three venues, an identity unique to the exhibition, and that there will be a centralized marketing effort. The exhibition catalog will be an enduring item and newly digitized items will be added going forward.

Of the 36 requested items, 26 are requested for display at The McMullen Museum, and five each to Houghton and ISGM. This will be the McMullen's first major exhibition following the opening of its renovated space. The item appraisals were a positive experience for BPL staff to observe. The appraised value of all 36 items is \$18.6 million. Three to four items have a higher value, but all items are relatively balanced in terms of appraised value. It is important to note the value of these items in discussing whether to recommend approval of the loan request.

Ms. Irmischer spoke to the approval process: for loan requests of items valued over \$50,000, the Special Collections Committee votes to recommend the loans to the full board of trustees. To further examine the request, Ms. Irmischer suggested the formation of a two-member sub-committee to review facility reports and insurance thresholds. The subcommittee would then report to the board of trustees and provide an even greater level of confidence. All requested items have been subject to a conservation assessment and those needing conservation have been conserved. The subcommittee review would further ensure that security, transport, and long-term preservation protocols are in place. A vote to recommend would, at this meeting, be contingent upon these requirements being met.

Mr. Stoneman assured the Committee that the BPL would be acknowledged as an institutional lender. Mr. Leonard said that making these items available is how the BPL delivers on its mission and further engages the public. Ms. Nixon commented that it is exciting to know that the BPL is one of the only truly public institutions participating; the citizens of Boston are owners of these materials and it is a reminder that great public institutions are part of the citizenry of Boston.

Mr. Kellogg and Ms. Nixon volunteered to serve as members of the sub-committee to further review the loan request and Mr. Stoneman recused himself from voting.

Upon motion made and duly seconded, it was then unanimously

VOTED: “that, pursuant to the terms of the Exhibition Loan Policy, the Boston Public Library Trustees Special Collections Committee recommends, contingent upon the favorable report of the appointed sub-committee examining exhibition conditions, that the Trustees of the Public Library of the City of Boston approve the Loan of thirty-six (36) objects to The McMullen Museum of Art at Boston College, 2101 Commonwealth Avenue, Chestnut Hill, MA 02467 and The Houghton Library, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA 02138 for period September 3 2016 to December 11, 2016, and The Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum, 280 The Fenway, Boston, MA 02115, for period September 20, 2016 to January 16, 2017, for purposes of Beyond Words: Illuminated Manuscripts from Boston-area Collections.”

Ms. Prindle described the next loan request, made by the Morgan Library and Museum, for loan of an 1866 Emily Dickinson letter to Thomas Wentworth Higginson. The loan would not take place until December 2016, but for timing and planning purposes, the vote is before the Committee at this time. The item will be appraised prior to the loan and The Morgan will cover all costs related to the loan – appraisals, conservation, transport and insurance.

Rep. Rushing suggested the Committee explore issues relative to lending to institutions where access to items is not as great as access provided by the BPL – Free to All. If BPL is providing items that will assist with an institution’s marketing efforts, the BPL should explore whether it should receive some of those profits. The BPL does not lend to corporations precisely because of the commercial component, but that it is a grey area. If the BPL does its job well, there will be an increasing interest in its collections. Policy and governance work related to these issues should be considered by a new BPL Trustee Chair and President. Mr. Leonard confirmed he is comfortable the Committee reviewing this loan under the existing policy, noting the policy may need examination going forward.

The subject letter is fragile but in good condition and as the lender BPL will insist on parameters related to its display. Mr. Ewald suggested the BPL develop its own loan questionnaire or checklist. Mr. Leonard explained that many loan requests are denied outright initially and do not make it to the level of Committee review.

Upon motion made and duly seconded, the Committee unanimously

VOTED: “that, pursuant to the terms of the Exhibition Loan Policy, the Boston Public Library Trustees Special Collections Committee recommends that the Trustees of the Public Library of the City of Boston approve the Loan of one (1) object to the Morgan Library and Museum, 225 Madison Avenue, New York, NY 10016 for period December 20, 2016 to June 2, 2017, for purposes of Emily Dickinson.”

There being no New Business, the meeting was adjourned at 10:05 a.m.

Respectfully submitted,



Deborah A. Kirrane, Clerk of the Board