

TRUSTEES OF THE PUBLIC LIBRARY OF THE CITY OF BOSTON

**Meeting of the Trustees Special Collections Committee
Tuesday, September 12, 2017 at 8:30 a.m.
Commonwealth Salon, Central Library
Boston Public Library, 700 Boylston Street, Boston, MA**

MINUTES

A meeting of the Boston Public Library Trustees Special Collections Committee (“Committee”) was held in the Commonwealth Salon at the Boston Public Library (“BPL”), 700 Boylston Street, Boston, MA on Tuesday, September 12, 2017 at 8:39 a.m.

Present at the meeting were: Committee Chair William Stoneman, and Committee Members: Trustee Byron Rushing, Cheryl Nixon, Vivian Spiro, Barbara “Muffy” Glauber, and David Leonard. Not present were Brian Clancy, Stanley Cushing, Brenda Lawson, Michael Ewald, Mary Lentz, and Jarvis Kellogg (Mr. Kellogg participated via conference call).

Also in attendance were BPL staff: Chief of Collections Laura Irmscher, Head of Special Collections Beth Prindle, and Clerk of the Board Pamela Carver, along with members of the public.

Committee Chair William Stoneman presided, called the meeting to order at 8:39 a.m., and addressed the order of business. Mr. Stoneman confirmed there were only six members present and therefore did not meet the requirements of a quorum. He reminded committee members that conference callers were not eligible to vote and emphasized that members’ presence at the meetings is vital. The members discussed the possibility of decreasing the size of the Committee to avoid quorum issues moving forward.

Mr. Stoneman called for a review of the meeting minutes of Thursday, April 26th, 2017. He offered edits relative to the minutes. The minutes of the October 18, 2016 meeting were deemed acceptable to post as “draft” without an official vote being taken (vote was postponed until the next Committee meeting).

Mr. Stoneman moved to the next item on the agenda, a review of the print inventory with Dr. Martha Mahard. Dr. Mahard gave a brief history as to how they got to where they are today with the collection. Noting that the BPL didn’t have intellectual control and staff to catalogue it in the past, so they worked with the Associates of the BPL on a three part plan to move forward.

1. Hire consultant and evaluate and develop a plan; hired Dr. Mahard.
2. Dr. Mahard spent one year surveying the collection, identified problems, and made suggestions.
3. Near end of this process, immediately developed an inventory of the collections.

Dr. Mahard noted there were prints dating from the 17th and 18th century. In 1941 the collection was established by the BPL Trustees by a gift from Wiggins.

She highlighted many well-known artists that are in the collection. While the collections grew, the staff did not. The catalogue was not done and there was a lack of inventory (which began in summer of 2015). She noted there were over 130,000+ prints that have been accounted for (but not sure if there are duplicates at this stage). She discussed there was a staff of herself as Project Manager, three supervisors, thirty three metadata collectors, and one volunteer working on the project for two years. She showed several before and after pictures of the cleared spaces that reflect new work areas and organized storage.

Dr. Mahard explained the new descriptive catalogue and inventory bar coded system. Beth Prindle, Head of the Special Collections said it was extraordinary how far the department has come and thanked Dr. Mahard for her service to the BPL. Ms. Prindle explained that the inventory information was for staff use only at this time and is not public facing. She added that they are working on streamlining our processes, noting that over 800,000 prints are now available on the Digital Commonwealth. This process was a huge move forward for the BPL and only getting faster as we continue which has made a difference for researchers.

The Committee discussed ways to improve on displaying quality exhibits to showcase the BPL's vast collection. Mr. Leonard explained they are working on rectifying the Gallery J showcase. They had a discussion of the scope of work and timeline anticipated in the print inventory and Ms. Prindle noted she will update the Committee at their next meeting on the progress.

Mr. Leonard noted that the Museum of Fine Arts ("MFA") is interested in doing an exhibition that will bring some of the riches of the BPL to light.

Next, Mr. Stoneman asked Ms. Prindle to give an update of the Rare Book inventory. Ms. Prindle joked one inventory is good, but two is better. The project ran from April to July 2017. It was an enormous undertaking over thirty five BPL staff. It involved physically taking each book off the shelf, bar coding it, and documenting it. It needed to be evaluated if the item was damaged and if it had an existing bar code. In the end, we inventoried 221,000 items in the collection with four teams running four shifts per day.

Ms. Prindle noted the information indicated there were 350 exceptions and learned 7.5% is assessed as damaged in the collection. She explained there are lots of augments, swords, glass frames, masks, weathervanes or loose things such as the Wiggins collection.

Ms. Spiro asked if there was an estimate on how long they anticipate and the cost of converting that card catalogue. Ms. Imscher answered that there are lots of traditional ways, however these are very different from standard cards because they are so specialized that any standard way out there would not fit this. She noted they are currently considering their options.

Mr. Stoneman added that it is desirable not to lose information with the transfer of cards; things that people noted on the backs of card they thought was important to document and therefore we need to be sure to not lose any of that information.

Ms. Imscher updated the Committee on the sound recordings that were deaccessioned to the Internet Archives. She explained they get the files digitized and the BPL has access to them. As part of the agreement, if the Internet Archives no longer wants the collection, the BPL has first right of refusal.

Representative Rushing added that there was a vigorous conversation with the Trustees regarding the deaccession of the sound recordings. The Trustees were very engaged and took this action very seriously.

Mr. Stoneman invited Ms. Prindle to brief the Committee on the two Escher loan requests from the MFA from February through May 2018. There are four pieces in total (valued between \$20,000-50,000). The MFA has agreed to frame them and handle all costs of shipping, packing, appraisals, and insurance.

Mr. Stoneman reiterated that due to a lack of quorum, an official vote would not be taken. However, he polled the Committee members present to make recommendations who unanimously recommended approving the MFA to loan the four items. An official vote will be taken by the Board of Trustees at their September 28th meeting.

Mr. Stoneman asked if there was any Public Comment. Mr. David Vieira, member of City-Wide Friends of the BPL, asked if the discarded frames from the returned artwork could be donated to the City-Wide Friends to sell at their public book sales. He noted that there were three references made in regards to the Associates funding and none to acknowledge those made by the City-Wide Friends of \$10,000 for digitization efforts. He expressed his concern over some of the Committee's lack of attendance at the Special Collections Committee meetings.

With no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 10:02 a.m.

Respectfully submitted,



Pamela Carver, Clerk of the Board