

TRUSTEES OF THE PUBLIC LIBRARY OF THE CITY OF BOSTON

Meeting of the Trustees Special Collections Committee Thursday April 26, 2017 at 8:30 a.m. Commonwealth Salon, Central Library Boston Public Library, 700 Boylston Street, Boston, MA 02116

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 Thursday, April 26, 2017 at 8:30 a.m.

Present at the meeting were: Committee Chair William Stoneman, and Committee Members: Brian Clancy, Stanley Cushing, Cheryl Nixon, Elizabeth “Lillie” Johnson, Vivian Spiro, Representative Byron Rushing, and David Leonard. Barbara “Muffy” Glauber, Brenda Lawson, Michael Ewald, Mary Lentz, and Jarvis Kellogg were not present.

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 8:33 a.m., and addressed the order of business. Mr. Stoneman confirmed there was a quorum and reminded committee members that conference callers were not eligible to vote. Mr. Stoneman welcomed Pamela Carver as the new clerk and thanked Mary Bender for her assistance with taking meeting minutes last fall.

Mr. Stoneman called for a review of the meeting minutes of October 18, 2016. Mr. Clancy offered edits relative to the minutes. Upon motion duly made and seconded, the minutes of the October 18, 2016 meeting were approved.

Mr. Stoneman offered a brief update on “Beyond Words – Illuminated Manuscripts from Boston-area Collections,” the exhibition in which items from BPL collections were featured at various museums throughout the Greater Boston area. He noted the exhibition had over 51,000 visitors, with a majority of them at the Gardner Museum. He felt the exhibition was hugely successful. (Everyone applauded) He explained that graduate students had been working on updating the website and ensuring information was being added as new images were being produced. The students will also be working on a new project that was recently funded by the Swiss National Science Foundation working with fragments of manuscripts. The project entails putting various fragments together; working collaboratively with other institutions around the world. This project is anticipated to push the limit on fragments, yet there are always questions of whether there is enough information included when they are put together digitally. Mr. Stoneman stated they have raised twenty five thousand dollars to publish this and hope not to charge more than they have to.

Mr. Leonard moved forward with the agenda with an update on Capital Projects. He noted that there is a commitment to fund the renovation of Rare Books dept. here in the Library. He explained that the renovation will cover the two floors of stacks where the rare books are stored, the staff space, as well as the public reading room. He explained that this goes to the Compass principle of accessibility. There was

a commitment of fifteen million dollars over two years. He explained that this budget is still subject to City Council approval until June 30 but that they have a strong balanced proposed budget and do not anticipate any problems in that regards.

In regards to the inventory, they need to determine what we have so we can secure it, most likely offsite. (There is an estimated 250,000 books and one million manuscripts). He stated that combined with what is already being done in the prints department, it is probably two of the strongest and most powerful collections ever being funded solely by Boston tax payer's dollars. He expressed his gratitude for the Associates' funding and collaboration on this project.

Ms. Spiro expressed her thanks to City Hall for this long overdue project. Mr. Leonard added that it was not in place of other work, but rather part of the five year projected plan of ninety million dollars from last year to approximately one hundred twenty million dollars, at its highest value with McKim renovations and the upgrade of the Conservation Lab.

Mr. Leonard explained that it was imperative to be done immediately in direct response to the mold outbreak. He relayed the Library is aware this project is not without impact on service but two years from now it will be an incredible resource.

Ms. Spiro questioned the Adams Library Collection and Ms. Prindle answered that the Library is looking at it as part of the large rare book collections.

Mr. Clancy commended the Library on keeping people updated through social media and photos and hoped that this approach would continue as the improvements are being made. Mr. Leonard thanked Ms. Spiro and the Associates on their successful event days prior called, "Literary Lights", which celebrates reading and writing at its core. This event raises millions of dollars for the library and was very well done. (Everyone applauded).

The Chair asked Ms. Irmischer to brief the Committee on the Sound recordings vote. Ms. Irmischer gave a brief description of the recommended vote before the Committee regarding the deaccession of the collections sound recording LPs. She told the Committee there were roughly two hundred thousand commercial recordings covering several genres (including but not limited to classical, popular, the spoken word, and rap music). The collection ranges from 1949 through the 1980s and evolved historically through donations and purchases. She explained the collection had been damaged from flood waters in the basement where it is currently being stored. The collection does not have a catalogue, but it had been inventoried after assessing the damage. The BPL does not have equipment to listen to it. For this reason, the LPs cannot be shared with the public and is essentially a "closed" collection. She continued that the Internet Archive had offered to digitize and store the collection at their archives in California. They would provide the BPL with digitized files and would therefore make it accessible to the public. The Special Collections Committee had a subcommittee that voted back in 2010 to approve this, but no movement was made to the collection. Since so much time had passed Ms. Irmischer wanted to bring it to the current committee for discussion.

Ms. Irmischer had recently resumed conversations with the Archives who expressed their continued interest. They would be willing to pay all costs to pack, store, and ship the collection while they digitize

it. The BPL will have the first right of refusal should they decide to get rid of the collection and any local labels would be returned to the BPL after being digitized. She proposed that the committee recommend to deaccession the collection to the archives in order to get the content out and available to the public. The Committee went on to discuss where the collection would be stored and what would be retained by the BPL. Ms. Irmscher explained that only the commercial LPs and 78 RPMs would be included. She explained the special music collections that were not commercial would be retained here at the BPL. Some committee members expressed concern that the BPL ensure that the Library be given first right of refusal in the event the Internet Archives no longer has interest in it. They also asked that all items be tagged as being from the BPL. The Committee also reviewed where the digital files would be accessible on the Digital Commonwealth portal. The decreasing value of the collection was also discussed as it was estimated originally between \$250,000 and one million dollars but was expected to be significantly lower today due to today's saturated market. The Committee raised concern over copyright and licensing issues. Mr. Leonard explained that the BPL is about to announce their agreement with Houghton Mifflin, which will allow the BPL to start lending from their collection housed here but could lend physically and online. This would be ground breaking decision and the BPL will be the first library given access. He stated that there are lots of interesting rights and the leadership that the BPL will be providing other libraries accessibility to the recordings. Mr. Leonard expressed that the essence of the vote today was to deliver on the Library's preservation and accessibility goals.

Representative Rushing clarified that the committee will be voting to recommend to allow staff to present a proposal to the Trustees based on the questions asked and their discussion, to deaccession the Sound Recordings to the Internet Archives to be presented at their next meeting.

Upon motion made and duly seconded, the Committee voted in favor.

Next the Chair called on Ms. Prindle to give a report on the Rare Books inventory. Ms. Prindle shared that they have roughly 240,000-250,000 rare books. As part of the capital project, they concluded how important it is to know where every book is at any given time. They have completed lots of digitization but much in this area is done via card codes.

She gave a quick overview of the project. They have hired four contractors to enter data paired along with a staff member. She explained the process and gave a sample of how they are doing the inventory, moving systematically down the rows. Only BPL staff workers will pull books and identify the code, read the call number to the data enterer who will capture it. The book is either flagged as damaged or given a code. This will allow the Library to capture at this time if a book is tied or damaged and allow them to go back for preservation at a later time.

She indicated that this is an inventory and not a catalog process. This barcode is associated with a shelf number and allows more intellectual control. It also allows the first step toward longer term catalog process, but Ms. Prindle was clear the inventory was only to track movement. She reviewed the schedule and that they have inventoried over forty two thousand items in three weeks (which is approximately 18% and on track with their projected timeline).

Ms. Prindle went on to discuss the augment pieces, and the question of what to do with the unique items such as the weathervane (regarding sorting, boxing and organizing). Other items such as The Marionettes are special, as well as lots of 3D materials that need special consideration. She shared with the Committee

that the Library hired a Preservation Manager, Jessica Bitely. Ms. Bitely has been with the Library for two months and helped craft ideas to properly handle these accommodations.

The Committee asked several questions regarding shelf list and call list being a true inventory of the collection. They discussed the public service component and the challenge to balance the inventory and public services. The Library initially allowed access to the inventory one day a week but moving forward determined the BPL will not be able to maintain that. Therefore, April 27th was the last day of reading room public service. They have a full day, expect it to be extremely busy with lots of questions in the coming weeks.

The Department is trying to fast track the digitization process as they recognize this causes an impact, on access to the collection. They hope to relay the message if the Library is to be a steward of this collection, then we need to do it with correct process. Ms. Spiro asked the question of accessibility for groups that want to come in. Mr. Leonard explained that generally speaking they will be closed to the public but will treat special requests on a case by case basis. The Library needed to make the decision to close based on the fact that if 90% of the collections is going to be stored offsite then we will not be able to access it. However, they will continue to look at each request separately.

Mr. Cushing explained that when the Boston Athenaeum did their renovation they had to deny most requests with few exceptions. He explained that most people understood but warned that it can take longer than anticipated. He noted the Athenaeum's took nearly three years to the one and a half year estimated time to complete. Ms. Nixon added that most researchers will understand the outcome will benefit them with clearer information. Mr. Stoneman expressed the importance of digitization for coming up with a short term solution so the Library will not lose researchers during this time.

The Committee discussed the actual bar code procedure and how to troubleshoot in the event the cards fall out of the books. They also discussed the importance of ensuring future funding to allow for an online catalogue of the books.

Ms. Spiro asked for an estimated cost to do a catalogue. Mr. Stoneman was reluctant to answer with any certainty not knowing the percentage of information of what is already done. Ms. Nixon stated that at a certain point, when inventory is done and is moving to cataloguing, it may be good time to have a subcommittee to offer institutional knowledge on the process and brainstorming to look at unique ways the Library can have a leading position. They can look at education and exhibition purposes to add into next phase. Mr. Leonard expressed he thought this is a good conversation, however the immediate driver for the Rare Books inventory is to prepare for the collection being offline in order to prepare doing the necessary environmental control repairs. The Committee needs to look at how they want the Library to look in two years. He said the two year goal and longer term projection will shape the next level of detail.

Next, Laura Irmischer gave a brief update, on the Prints inventory. She said they started in June 2016, and will have full report by Sept. 2017. She explained this will be first major collection to be completed. They will have a report for the Committee at the September meeting but they have learned so much about the inventory and very excited to share the full report with each of them soon. Ms. Spiro asked who will

head the Prints department after it is completed and if there will be room to bring in an expert in the field whose team can manage the conservation with the scholarly oversight. She asked if there may be room to have this position privately funded. Ms. Irmscher responded that the Library is in the process of restructuring the Print Department and process of negotiating with the unions and that there may be the possibility to be shaped for private funding. Mr. Leonard added that perhaps the Library and look outside of the box and utilize some scholar residents and interns.

The Committee moved onto the Italian repatriation ceremony. Ms. Prindle briefed the Committee on the Repatriation ceremony that had occurred on April 19, 2017. This matter was brought to the attention of this Committee some years ago, and an announcement was made by the Mayor's office and the BPL press team. The BPL participated in a repatriation ceremony in partnership with the United States attorney, Italian colleagues, the Department of Homeland Security and the City of Boston to repatriate three items that were deemed to be owned by two Italian institutions. One was the State Archives in Venice and the other is a Library located in Sicily. All items were purchased by BPL through a reputable seller, but deemed they were removed improperly from Italy.

This process has taken several years while working closely with Homeland Security, and our City legal team. All parties were under a strict gag order while working on this with the authorities which led to the repatriation. Representative Rushing was present and acknowledged as a Committee member at the event. All parties involved agreed it was the right process done for this and the right thing to do. At the end of this, we repatriated these items correctly and would treat any item that is not ours seriously. Overall, it was a very positive experience.

Representative Rushing explained that the Trustees were ready to send the items back immediately when they first discovered this. He was rather perplexed at the time it took to complete this and return them to Italy.

The Chair asked for update on the Shakespeare exhibition. Ms. Prindle explained that the exhibition closed at the end of March. It was an extremely successful run with nearly sixty five thousand visitors and particularly more tours and interest from educators and school groups. The Library has returned all items. Ms. Prindle has been in touch with funders and they are all thrilled with the success. They are particularly impressed with what we did. The Library expressed a heartfelt thank you for the funder's support of this exhibition and Jay Moschella who curated the show, on an unmitigated success.

Now turning our attention on what we can do in the future. Ms. Spiro inquired if the exhibition would be available online. Ms. Prindle explained that they do not have immediate plans but have maintained all the content. The Library is undergoing a website overhaul and think once we have a mechanism to use, the exhibition will be added.

Mr. Stoneman concluded the meeting agenda by discussing the proposed calendar for the upcoming year. He discussed that there was some concerns regarding holding the meetings on Tuesdays and asked if any members wanted to move the date. He did clarify with respect to the other members who are absent, that the group that is present today is typically the same group at most meetings. The Committee discussed that there will always be individual conflicts but stressed the need for a quorum, to ensure they are present to handle the important decisions of the Committee. The Committee approved the proposed calendar

noting that it is subject to change. The Committee will next meet on Tuesday, September 12, 2017 at 8:30 a.m.

With no further business, upon motion made and duly seconded, the meeting was adjourned at 9:59 a.m.

Respectfully submitted,



Pamela Carver, Clerk of the Board