

TRUSTEES OF THE PUBLIC LIBRARY OF THE CITY OF BOSTON

**Meeting of the Trustees Special Collections Committee
Thursday, November 15, 2018 at 8:30 a.m.
Commonwealth Salon, Central Library
Boston Public Library, 700 Boylston Street, Boston, MA**

DRAFT 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, November 15, 2018.

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

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 8:36 a.m., and addressed the order of business. Mr. Stoneman reminded member of the importance of their presence for quorum requirements and that conference callers were not eligible to vote.

Mr. Stoneman called for a review of the meeting minutes of May 1, 2018. The clerk adjusted the minutes accordingly to the suggested edits made.

I. Special Collections Committee Updates

Mr. Leonard announced that two committee members, Mary Lentz and Jarvis Kellogg had stepped down due to their scheduling difficulties. Mr. Leonard pressed upon the Committee for suggestions on future committee members to ensure participation and representation in line with the BPL’s mission and initiatives.

Additionally, Mr. Stoneman announced that a third committee member, Mr. Stanley Cushing, sent his resignation letter on November 14, 2018. Mr. Cushing’s letter stated that he was sorry he was unable to attend to announce his resignation in-person. Since retirement, he felt out of touch with library issues and believed the Special Collections Committee deserved someone who had a finger on the pulse of current concerns. He hoped his letter of resignation would aid with the efforts to reinvigorate the committee with new members. He thanked the BPL for allowing him to be involved for the last number of years. Mr. Stoneman echoed David Leonard’s sentiments about discussing new members with more experience from an advisory point of view. Mr. Leonard explained that appointments to the committees falls under the purview of the Chair of the Board, but asked the committee members to submit any recommendations for consideration.

The Committee discussed the need to reevaluate the membership while looking at the focus of the Committee to determine the best candidates. If they should consider academic experts who can help make an impact on policy or people who can support conservation initiatives, or both. They felt a diversified committee with an array of people with deep pockets and academic expertise would be prudent while building stronger relationships with other Boston area cultural institutions. Mr. Leonard noted that a few Trustees had expressed interest in joining this committee. He hoped that would result in

a more robust attendance with more focused agendas. They were going to review the committee charter to ensure necessary updates were made accordingly.

II. Special Collections Report

Ms. Irmischer began with an update on the Rare Books renovation project. She explained they were nearing the end of the design phase. They had been working with the City's Public Facilities Department and the architect, Finegold Alexander, on the McKim Master Plan and Design. They were in the final review with the expert consultants who were engaged throughout the process to review the environmental systems, the shelving, and the security components to make sure they have everything in place. It was important it was functioning at the highest standards to make the collection accessible, to protect it, and make sure that the staff are able to serve the public and use the collection most effectively.

The Design was anticipated to be complete by year's end, followed by the contractor bidding process. She was hopeful that the construction would begin in the spring of 2019 and anticipated to take approximately one and a half years. Unlike other projects where you can do more than one thing at once, this move in had to be done strategically. There needed to be time allowed for off gassing and ensuring the mechanicals were working properly, before bringing back the collections.

The BPL selected the firm, Clancy Relocation and Logistics for the packing, moving, and storage of the Rare Books department. The BPL had not worked with them prior but had undergone a rigorous vetting process through the RFP. They have a broad experience in handling rare and fragile materials and dealing with very large-scale moves. Their building far exceeded the others they toured, and met all of their standards on protecting the collection. The BPL spent the summer working with Clancy Relocation and Logistics to map out a very careful and detailed plan. The collection move started in the fall and was 90% complete. Due to security concerns, Ms. Irmischer was not able to reveal much more, but wanted to update the Committee that the move was going well.

Ms. Spiro asked if scholars who were interested in using the collections have access to the materials during the project. Ms. Irmischer noted they would be no access to the materials. She explained they did extensive work digitizing as much of the collection as they could and would continue their reference assistance to answer as many patrons as possible. Ms. Irmischer said they looked at balancing the very strong public need to access the collection and the very real security and handling risk of moving things back and forth, ultimately determining they needed to keep it closed while away in storage. A small subset of items remained at the BPL so that staff could continue to work on them; cataloging, conservation work, or general collection information updates for the duration of the renovation.

Mr. Leonard added that they were not with zero items digitized either, so there would be a part of the collection available digitally. Recognizing that it was not the whole collection nor the same as the physical items. He noted this project was the equivalent to a whole branch reopening from an investment standpoint, but clearly different from special collections standpoint.

The committee brainstormed about different ideas for the reopening and ways to stay engaged during the department closure to utilize our new website.

Beth Prindle noted that a bonus for employees during the closure was being able to take advantage of all the opportunities that the new BPL website offers. Due to the demand of getting ready for the renovation, they were not able to build content, to write about our collections or research guides, and not able to create the links within the catalog. This opportunity during closure was a welcomed time to do the critical work of building that digital presence. Ms. Prindle added that the Collections team had been providing robust public services electronically and that they specifically held back things that could make

it through the entire cycle; of cataloguing, conservation, to digitization and be helpful to a large constituency. Ms. Prindle reminded the committee that there were vast amounts of special collections that were still at the BPL that required attention: prints, photos, and all sorts of materials that were still going through those processes and discovery as well.

Ms. Irscher gave an update on the inventory work done in total, recognizing that doing the inventory was just a baseline. They needed accurate information about the collections and matching them up with the historical records written on cards or in various places, but compiling into one accurate and up to date inventory. They had been working on prints, photographs, rare books, manuscripts, and subset of the music collection. Since July 2015, they had inventoried over 533,000 items. She noted while not the purview of this committee, they had also worked on the circulating collection and within the same time period had inventoried four branches, bringing the inventoried items to over 640,000 items. The team had learned a lot on how to structure the projects tailored to the needs of a specific format or collection. Mr. Leonard was thrilled to point out that they matched the packed items to the inventory done and there were no anomalies or exceptions, which was a credit to the quality of the inventory work done. Ms. Irscher noted there were about 22 million things left in the general research category and photographs, as well as items in the art and architecture department to catalog.

III. Special Collections Staffing Updates

Ms. Irscher explained the restructuring the Special Collections Department done over the last couple of years. This kicked off from an investment from the City and The Associates to fund additional positions in the area of Special Collections. They reviewed the positions they had and the needs in other areas to determine best ways to realign the reporting structure to allow for new positions while building teams that were more effective and would fill in expertise gaps in various subject areas. The process was ongoing but wanted to give an update on a few positions that either had moved forward or were coming up.

- A. Preservation Manager: Jessica Bitely was hired in 2017 to fill this position. She had been indispensable during the collection work. We could not have done it without her, having the preservation oversight with moving collections. She ensured things were handled, packed, and stored appropriately.
- B. Stacks Coordinator: This position will report to Preservation Manager. They would be looking at the organization and arrangement of the collections in the stacks that focuses on special collections and research collections.
- C. Special Collections Cataloging Manager: This position was posted internally and would oversee a new special collections cataloguing team. Previously had a very large cataloguing team that oversaw the catalogue process generally. This position would focus specifically on the special collections. They will have expertise in subject areas and formats, recognizing that special collections cataloguing was very different.
- D. Manager of the Arts: This department would be reconfigured to include prints and photography, it currently only focuses on fine arts and music. Bringing them together into a larger department in a way that made better sense. Will be bringing in staff to fill in any needs in photography, prints, fine arts and music.
- E. Rare Books and Manuscripts Department: These positions were still in discussion but looking to see how that staff was better aligned.

- F. Archives Department: Ms. Irmischer added they were also looking at building an Archives Department. They do not have staff dedicated to all of the BPL's archives in various areas. We have not looked at our own internal archives, which is an important part of our collection, so that would be a mandate of this department as well. Recognizing there had been any expertise in this area before.

IV. Toulouse Lautrec Loan Update

Beth Prindle noted that they had loaned 109 items, the largest in recent history that the Special Collections Committee approved. The Museum of Fine Arts ("MFA") would be offering free admission to the exhibit for the month of June to anyone with a BPL library card.

The MFA served as the leader on this loan, doing all the matting and framing. The Conservation Lab, the Associates of the BPL, and the MFA were also conserving some of the posters. All 109 posters were digitized and available to download.

The Committee discussed their disappointment that BPL cardholders were only free for the month of June and suggested they recommend it be for the duration of the entire exhibits in the future. They agreed that this was a great step forward with building a stronger collaboration with the MFA. Mr. Leonard added that the MFA covered all conservation costs incurred other than those covered by The Associates.

Brian Clancy acknowledged Vivian Spiro on her retirement from The Associates. He noted her extraordinary commitment to the BPL and could not imagine where they would be without her.

Ms. Spiro thanked them all for their kind words, and expressed her love of her time served at the BPL. She noted the importance to have all these viable accessible things in the library and museums and hoped the effects of the work over the last twenty years will go on for many years to come.

Mr. Stoneman asked for new business for which there was none. He called for public comment.

Elissa Cadillac, President of AFSCME asked that the charter/mission, committee members, and draft minutes be posted on the website.

Susan Applegate, BPL employee, commented that when hearing about the Fine Arts and Music Departments combining, she was aghast and disappointed that one position was not a musicologist. Ms. Irmischer quickly explained that the Curator of Music would cover that.

With no additional business, the chair adjourned the meeting at 9:41 a.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Pamela Carver, Clerk of the Board