

# **TRUSTEES OF THE PUBLIC LIBRARY OF THE CITY OF BOSTON**

## **Meeting of the Trustees Special Collections Committee Wednesday, December 15, 2021 at 8:30 a.m. via Zoom**

### **MINUTES**

A meeting of the Trustees Special Collections Committee (“Committee”) was held on December 15, 2021 at 8:30 a.m. via Zoom.

Present at the meeting were: Committee Chair, Ben Bradlee Jr, Vice Chair K. Matthew Dames, along with Committee members: Jabari Asim, Juan Enriquez, David Leonard, and Alan Leventhal. Absent members: Grace Fey, Jeff Hawkins, and Elizabeth Johnson.

Also present were: Pamela Carver, Clerk of the Board, Priscilla H. Douglas, Board Chair, along with BPL staff and members of the public.

Committee Chair Ben Bradlee Jr welcomed all to the first meeting of the newly formed Special Collections committee. He called the meeting to order at 8:31 a.m. and began by reading the Trustees reaffirmation statement. A roll call was taken and determined there was a quorum. All in attendance were reminded that the meeting was being recorded and to sign up for public comment before the sign up period closed.

Mr. Bradlee introduced the new Committee members that included: Ben Bradlee Jr, K. Matthew Dames who would serve as Vice Chair, Jabari Asim, Joe Berman, Juan Enriquez, Grace Fey, Jeff Hawkins, Alan Leventhal, David Leonard, and returning member Elizabeth Johnson. Each member gave a brief background and expressed various ways each of them hoped to make the collections at the BPL more visible and accessible to the public. Additionally, they hoped to focus on engagement with the collections via exhibitions, partnerships, or collaborative initiatives; similar to those already established with the Associates and the Leventhal Map & Education Center (“LMEC”).

Laura Irscher announced that she was resigning from her position of Chief of Collections to move to Connecticut. She assured them that she was leaving the department in great hands with the collections team in place. Ms. Irscher gave a brief update on the Rare Books renovation with more details to come in the spring.

Mr. Bradlee thanked Ms. Irscher for her tenure at the BPL and wished her well in her future endeavors. Mr. Leonard added his appreciation for Ms. Irscher for all of her contributions to the BPL noting the Special Collections were in a much better position because of her efforts.

Next, Ms. Beth Prindle, Head of Special Collections, noted some key hires to the Special Collections department. They selected a Public Services Librarian who will oversee the Special Collections reading room and will be starting in January. They were actively interviewing for two archivist positions, the conservation officer, and a research collections manager. They were looking forward to welcoming the new staff that would be hired in 2022.

Ms. Prindle announced a grant from an anonymous donation through the BPL Fund and the Associates to support the project of cleaning and adding descriptions to our founding research collections. This collection consists of hundreds of thousands of materials collected during the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century. The grant would allow them to start work on a portion of this collections. An RFP was issued and they selected a candidate for the project manager to oversee it. They hope to have this manager meet with this committee in future meetings to discuss this multi-year project.

There was a newspaper grant through the National Digital Newspaper Program to digitize thousands of images from microfilm from our newspaper collection. This project was kicked off under the stewardship of our digital partners team.

Ms. Prindle also noted that the LMEC received a major grant in partnership with Mount Vernon. She noted that she would not reveal the details, but noted the LMEC team will be presenting to this committee in February to discuss the stewardship of their collection and their focus on access and programming.

Next, Ms. Prindle introduced the BPL Curator of Music, Jared Rex. Mr. Rex joined the BPL in 2020 during the pandemic. His position is funded through the Associates of the BPL. Ms. Prindle gave a brief background on his professional experience and invited him to speak to the Committee.

Mr. Rex stated that his goal was to orient the Committee on the history of the BPL's Music collections and to help them better understand the significance of some of the treasures held within it. He hoped to make the collections more accessible to the public, not only the citizens of Boston, but to scholars and musicians worldwide.

Mr. Rex reviewed the types of formats that are held in the music collections. Noting, to many people's surprise, the BPL has little recorded sound, but rather the majority of the collection were manuscript scores. These treasures included first and early edition published scores, rare editions containing annotations and sketches, monographs and journals, and performance ephemera.

He showed some examples of some notable artifacts held in BPL's digitized manuscript scores, such as: a score with handwritten notes from Mozart's *Fugue*, a first edition of Beethoven's *Symphony No.9*, John Dowland's early printed music *First Book of Songes* (from 1597) and a copyist's manuscript of Johann Sebastian Bach's *Goldberg Variations*.

The history of the collection began with the BPL founding with two major special collections, the Joseph Koudelka Collection (from 1858) and the Allen A. Brown Collection (from 1894). Public libraries at that time did not have the resources to collect music due to high costs and limited printing runs. It was not until 1837 that there was a focus on starting a music library. Members of the general public pushed for more accessibility to music. Music was being collected at the BPL before the opening of the first reading room in 1852.

The first collection of music acquired at the BPL was the Joseph Koudelka Collection, it consisted of approximately 500 volumes. The collection principally contains early influential writers of western classical writers (pre-1700). Some works are extremely rare and are one of few copies known to exist. Mr. Rex gave a background on how Mr. Koudelka developed his collection.

Some concert ephemera noted the BPL in the footnotes noting examples of the collaboration with many cultural institutions in the 1800s.

The Allen A. Brown collection receives the most reference inquiries from the BPL Music Collection. This foundational collection serves as an integral collection to America's music history and Boston's musical life. The collection grows to this day through the Brown Trust funds. The collection was given to the BPL upon the completion of the McKim Building in 1894. The initial donation was comprised of 6,990 volumes of predominantly western art music but now totals 40,000 volumes. This collection was what put the BPL on the map internationally as an institute that houses musical treasures.

The Brown Collection reflects diverse music and formats. Including operas, concert ephemera scrapbooks, and autograph musical scores and was continually being developed to reflect all music.

Mr. Rex ended his presentation by noting some other notable collections held in the Music Collections and

his commitment to ensuring accessibility to our treasured collections.

The Committee thanked Mr. Rex for his thorough presentation. They discussed the idea of potential exhibitions or collaborative partnerships. They discussed having some 20<sup>th</sup> century collections reflected to showcase modern genres of music to offer a diverse collection of all times.

Mr. Bradlee asked for new business. Mr. Leonard noted for the purpose of future agendas, he reminded the Committee members that the goal of the meetings this year were to orient the members on particular holdings within Special Collections.

Mr. Bradlee asked for public comment for which there was none. With no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 9:59 a.m.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Camela R. Carver". The signature is written in a cursive style.

Pamela Carver, Clerk of the Board of Trustees