



# BPL SPECIAL COLLECTIONS COMMITTEE

*Ben Bradlee Jr, Committee Chair*

*5.11.23*

Members of the Public may sign up for Public Comment via the CHAT by 9:00 a.m.  
Comments left in the chat will not be acknowledged. written comments may be submitted to the Clerk of the Board, [pcarver@bpl.org](mailto:pcarver@bpl.org)

# BPL OPENING STATEMENT

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The Trustees of The Boston Public Library reaffirm our commitment to racial equity and to principles of diversity equity and inclusion, more broadly.

The Library is formally committed to becoming an anti-racist organization in response to systemic racism, inequity, and injustice prevalent in our society.

We acknowledge also that the Boston Public Library's Central Library stands on land that was once a water-based ecosystem providing sustenance for the indigenous Massachusetts people *and is a place which has long served as a site of meeting and exchange among nations*. We are committed to land acknowledgements for all locations at which we operate.

*We reaffirm this commitment to set the context for our planning, deliberations, and public engagement so that they take place from the spirit of welcome and respect, found in our motto 'free to all.'*

*Taken from the Institutional Statement Ratified by the Board of Trustees for the Boston Public Library on September 29, 2020.*

# SPECIAL COLLECTIONS COMMITTEE

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Ben Bradlee Jr, Committee Chair

- Welcome Remarks
- Roll Call of Committee Members
- Approval of Meeting Minutes of 11.29.22

# Special Collections 2022 Highlights



## Special Collections Renovation & Reopening

- Planned and mapped 7 miles of shelving
- Returned and reshelved over 250,000 rare books and music collections and 2,300 LF of archives/manuscripts from offsite storage
- Reopened to the public September 2022

Launched **refreshed web presence** [www.bpl.org/special-collections](http://www.bpl.org/special-collections)

Hired and onboarded 10 staff members

Launched **Aeon technology** for materials tracking and patron requests

Scanned over **1 million catalog cards**

# Special Collections Stats (Sept 2022-Mar 2023)

## In-Person Research

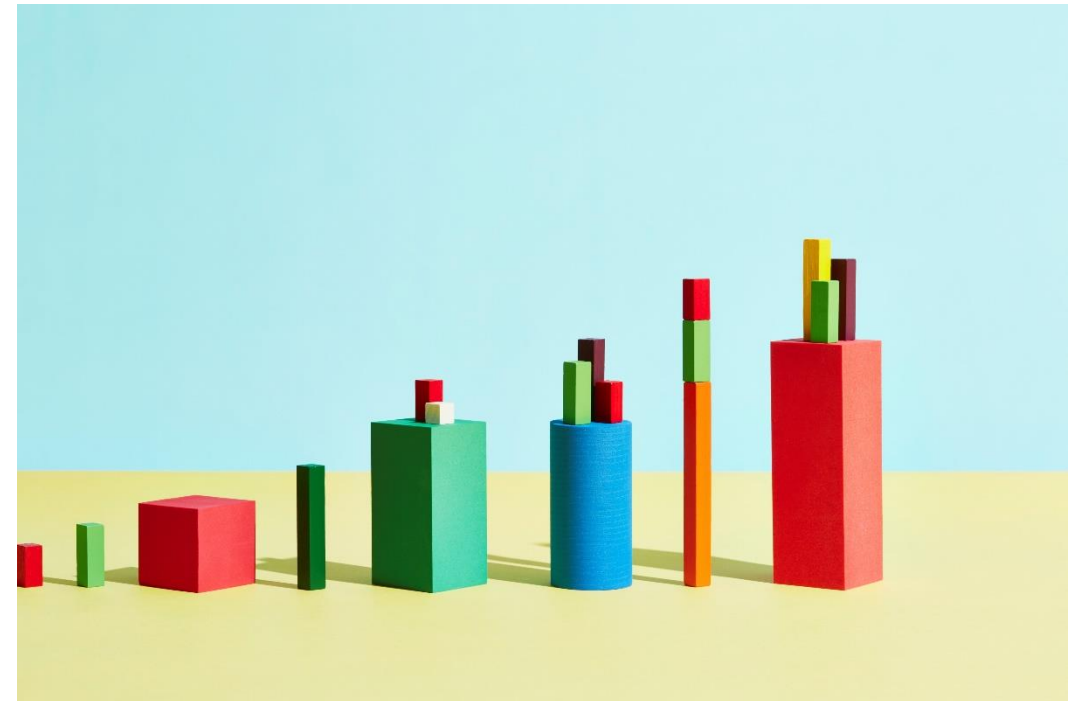
- 256 research appointments
- 179 researchers
- 66% of our researchers were from MA
- 19 states other than MA
- 11 different countries (including the US)
- Checked out 828 items to researchers and paged 144 additional items
- 33,852 minutes of in-person research
- Average appointment length is 2.6 hours

## Tours and Visits

- 1,970 visitors to the lobby
- 17 tours\* for 132 visitors with 109 items  
\*tours for which we pulled items
- Hosted 4 class visits for 62 students
- Hosted two Special Collections Samplers

## Online Reference

- 937 LibAnswers tickets - 1273 reference transactions
  - 32% of our correspondents from MA
  - 38% elsewhere in the US
  - 16% international scholars
  - 14% not sure



# Special Collections Reading Room

what are patrons requesting?—a recent snapshot

orchestral scores  
by **Samuel  
Coleridge-Taylor**

**Urban Arts  
archives**

**Boston  
Gleaning  
Circle Records**

1744 poem  
**"The Comet"**

**cuneiform  
tablets**

**Roland Hayes  
papers** related to  
his 80<sup>th</sup> birthday  
party

14 different  
copies of *Love's  
Labours Lost*

**Charlestown  
Town Records**

**Cuban poetry  
and New York  
newspapers**

**Loyal  
Publication  
Society  
materials**

George Bellows  
prints

**Boston Female  
Anti-Slavery  
Society**

**Ralph Adams  
Cram's  
architectural  
work in Japan**

**Renaissance  
literature and  
the concept of  
utopia**

**female benevolent  
societies during  
the 19<sup>th</sup> century**

**documents about  
history and culture  
of Newark, NJ**

Exhibition catalogues  
related to the Gardner  
Museum's **Black Glass  
Madonna**

letters from  
**Josephine Pierre  
St. Ruffin and the  
Woman's Era Club**

Type size in **books  
printed in London  
between 1660 and  
1700**

**Walt Whitman and  
items from  
Elizabeth Porter  
Gould**

Architectural  
drawings by  
**William G. Preston**

Books related to  
**agriculture in early  
America**

1774 manuscript  
and letters related  
to **Phillis Wheatley**

**early atlases and  
an early edition of  
*Purchas His Pilgrim***

Aviation photos in  
the ***Boston Herald-  
Traveler Photo  
Morgue***

**burial landscapes  
in colonial  
settlements in the  
northeast**

**Fashion in *Les  
Journals Des  
Dames et Des  
Modes***

artist **Edwin  
Austin Abbey**

Ernst Halberstadt  
***Documerica***  
photos

**Sacco &  
Vanzetti  
Collection**



# 2023 Public & Staff Engagement Work

hosting monthly themed **public drop-in show-and-tells (Samplers)**

collaborating with BPL Communications on **social media and patron newsletter** promotions + media features (*CBS Sunday Morning, Chronicle*)

Building **BPL staff awareness** about collections, digitized materials, and upcoming initiatives

Celebrating **upcoming commemorations** (Shakespeare's First Folio 400<sup>th</sup>)

collaborating with staff across BPL and funders to develop shared **partnership priorities** and opportunities with external organizations

planning ongoing content rotation for **display cases**





## 2023 Research & Education Work

partnering with Research Services on **cross-training and collaborative patron services**

streamlining patron reference services: **single reference portal** ([specialcollections@bpl.org](mailto:specialcollections@bpl.org)) for all special collections questions (including LMEC)

expanding capacity to support **class visits** and build awareness through outreach to educators

exploring and developing **fellowship and internship** opportunities (NERFC, North Bennet, Simmons)







# 2023 Collections Discovery & Stewardship Work

Collection Space launch – Arts discovery tool

*Collections areas of focus:*

- *Boston Herald Traveler Photo Morgue* pilot
- Connick stained glass digitization
- Bates Hall busts conservation
- WHDH audio-visual materials pilot

Ongoing **collection security** improvements

Onboarding Rare Books cataloger

Archives retroactive accessioning project

Rewriting **Collection Development Policy**



Topics from the field: **inclusive description**

# how is the BPL participating in the following?

- **Outreach strategies** to engage diverse audiences and approaching contextualization of materials that may be harmful, particularly when one may be an “outsider” to these communities.
- **Building trust and repairing harm** through community-centered practices, including reparative description, post-custodial work, enabling self-identity and definition, and respectful engagement with inherited collections.
- Strategies for **forming productive organizational relationships** to perform core work, such as setting access priorities, creating description, or engaging with creators and donors.
  - *Why now? Why is this important?*
  - *How does this connect to the library’s larger work in becoming a more equitable and inclusive organization?*
  - *What are the challenges?*

# Harmful language statement | [archives.bpl.org](https://archives.bpl.org)

**Archives & Special Collections at Boston Public Library**

About the Archives Collections Unprocessed Material Subjects Names Collecting Areas Help Q

Welcome to Boston Public Library Archives

**Search The Archives**

Enter your search terms

Search

**About**

This site contains descriptions and inventories of the archival collections of the Boston Public Library and the Norman B. Leventhal Map & Education Center.

**What are archives?**

An archival collection is a group of related materials that document the activities of an individual, family, or organization. BPL archives include personal papers, photographs, and subject-based collections, as well as records. Archives at BPL are described in **finding aids**, which include information about the creation, content, arrangement, and context of these collections and finding aids on our [Help page](#).

**Finding other rare, historic, and special collections at BPL**

While archival collections are described on this site, you'll find descriptions of single manuscripts, maps, photographs, prints, drawings, music, and databases. To explore other formats, visit the [BPL Special Collections Map Center website](#).

Boston Public Library special collections are available for the study and enjoyment of all.

**Statement on Harmful Description**

BPL finding aids describe historical materials that reflect the attitudes, ideas, and norms of the time periods and cultures in which they were created and may include direct quotations or detailed descriptions of original documents that use inappropriate or harmful language. While the BPL strives for equitable and inclusive description, we recognize that this has not always been the case. Legacy finding aids may reflect the time periods in which they were created and the biases of the people who created them. These finding aids are available online because the access that they provide to primary source materials is uniquely valuable to the research community at large.

Our efforts to repair outdated descriptions and to describe our collections in an equitable way are iterative and ongoing.

[Back to top](#)

Statement on harmful description, linked in footer of every page.

Statement on Harmful Description | BPL Special Collections | Contact Special Collections Staff | Staff Interface

[archives.bpl.org](https://archives.bpl.org) homepage

Statement on harmful description, included in every finding aid.

**Archives & Special Collections at Boston Public Library**

About the Archives Collections Unprocessed Material Subjects Names Collecting Areas Help Q

**Boston (Mass.) Overseers of the Poor Indentures**

Collection Call Number: MS 7248

Boston Public Library Archives & Special Collections > Boston (Mass.) Overseers of the Poor Indentures

Collection Overview Full Collection View Box List

into service to the English. The names and ages of the children, the names of their relations, the places where they belonged, and the names of the persons with whom they were placed are included. Dated 10 August 1675.

**General**

Former BPL call number MS Bos. W2. Conservation generously underwritten by the Associates of the Boston Public Library and the Yale Class of 1955 in honor of David McCullough.

**Processing Information**

Finding aid written by Kimberly Reynolds, August 2014.

**Processing Information**

This electronic finding aid is transcribed from legacy data. In many cases, transcriptions were not verified against collection materials at the time of transcription. As a result, this finding aid could be incomplete and might only reflect a partial understanding of the material.

**Statement on harmful description**

Archival description reflects the biases of time periods and cultures in which it was created and may include direct quotations or descriptions that use inappropriate or harmful language. Creator provided descriptions may be maintained in order to preserve the context in which the collection was created and/or used. Legacy description and potentially offensive content may be made available online until a collection can be reprocessed because the access that they provide to primary source materials is uniquely valuable to the research community at large. Our efforts to repair outdated descriptions and to describe our collections more equitably are iterative and ongoing.

**Subjects**

- Almshouses — Records — Massachusetts — Historical
- Boston (Mass.). — Overseers of the Poor
- Boston (Mass.). — Selectmen
- Child Labor — Massachusetts — Boston — History
- Children — Massachusetts — Poverty
- Indentured Servants
- Massachusetts — Social Life and Customs

Former BPL Call Number MS Bos. W2. Conservation generously underwritten by the Associates of the Boston Public Library and the Yale Class of 1955 in honor of David McCullough.

Online finding aid on [archives.bpl.org](https://archives.bpl.org)

# Reparative description in archival collections...

## *Replacing harmful language with language surrounding enslaved persons*

### Ziba B. Oakes Papers

- Use of harmful language: “slaves”, “master”, “slaveholder”, etc.
- Description exclusively highlights the perspective of White enslavers, while erasing experience of enslaved persons.
- Collection includes difficult content related to records of American chattel slavery. The finding aid needs additional content warnings informing users of the presence of challenging content and providing *context* for the inclusion of original transcriptions.

*Online finding aid for  
Ziba B. Oakes Papers*

#### Scope and Contents

The 652 letters in this collection document the business dealings of Ziba B. Oakes, an enslaver and broker of enslaved persons, who lived in Charleston, South Carolina. The letters were written by several business associates and cover all aspects of the trade of enslaved persons such as financial

#### Immediate Source of Acquisition

The Ziba Oakes papers were taken from a Charleston, South Carolina holding site for enslaved persons on February 20, 1865 by James Redpath. Redpath gave the papers to William Lloyd Garrison in April 1865. The collection was later donated to the Boston Public Library on November 11, 1891 by Francis Jackson Garrison.

#### Related Materials

Slave Trade Letters, 1839. MS fAM 1034

#### Related Publications

Drago, Edmund L. ed. *Broke by the War: Letters of a Slave Trader*. University of South Carolina Press. 1991.

#### Processing Information

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• Replaced harmful language: “slave pen”, “slaves”, “master”, etc.

• Clarified provenance

• Added contextual notes for legacy description

• Added harmful description notice about presence of difficult or harmful content.

# Reparative description in archival collections...

*Refocusing description to emphasize humanity and personhood of indentured children*

## Boston (Mass.) Overseers of the Poor Indentures *(item record in online finding aid)*

Servant: Dalley, Mary. Master: Frothingham, Thomas. Town of Master: Charlestown, 2 July 1740

File – Box: 1, Folder: 4  
Boston Public Libr

**Scope and Contents**  
1 s. (2 p.)

**Dates**  
2 July 1740

**Conditions Governing Access**  
*From the Collection:*  
Collection is open for re

**Conditions Governing Access**  
*From the Collection:*  
The collection is open fo

**Extent**

**Mary Dalley indentured to apprentice with Thomas Frothingham of Charlestown, 2 July 1740**

File – Box: 1, Folder: 4 Call Number: MS 7248


Boston Public Library Archives & Special Collections > Boston (Mass.) Overseers of the Poor Indentures (MS 7248) > Mary Dalley indentured to apprentice with Thoma:

**Scope and Contents**  
1 s. (2 p.)

**Dates**  
2 July 1740

**Conditions Governing Access**  
*From the Collection:*  
Collection is open for research.

**Conditions Governing Access**  
*From the Collection:*  
The collection is open for research.



Mary Dalley indentured to apprentice with Thomas Frothingham of Charlestown

After  
reparative  
work...

Use of words “s

Child's name is listed first, followed by the more historically correct term “indentured” and details of the child's relationship within the receiving household.

# Reparative description for printed books and individual manuscripts ...

*Challenges of scale, data complexity, descriptive continuity, and national standards ...*

## What is a catalog record?

### John Brown's diary

Fields in red contain terms selected from lists or are formulated according to national standards

- A catalog record contains a series of related data fields that collectively describe a single resource
- "Cataloging" involves both exact transcription of information in an item and inclusion of standardized indexing terms
- Goal of cataloging is to match "like with like" and to ensure findability
- Must be consistent within our own holdings, holdings throughout BPL, and across the world
- Reparative description challenges us to think outside of these established constructs

*MARC data for John Brown's farm diary*

```
LDR          ntm 22  a 4500
001          1556803
005          20230324193101.0
008          090629q18381859ohue      000 0deng d
035          ⚭a3347148
035          ⚭a3347148
040          ⚭dUtOrBLW
099          ⚭aMS q Am.1996
100  1       ⚭aBrown, John,⚭d1800-1859.
245  10      ⚭aMemorandum [sic] book of John Brown, Franklin, Portage Co. Ohio.
246  1       ⚭aMemorandum book of John Brown, Franklin Mills, Portage Co. Ohio
260          ⚭c[1838-1859].
300          ⚭a2 v. ;⚭c14-15 cm.
336          ⚭atext⚭btxt⚭2rdacontent
337          ⚭aunmediated⚭bn⚭2rdamedia
338          ⚭avolume⚭bnc⚭2rdacarrier
500          ⚭aVolume 1: "Bought Decem 3d 1838 of J and G Ganvill & Co, price $0.25"
500          ⚭aHolograph, signed. Also includes manuscript in other hands.
500          ⚭aThe binding of both volumes is broken and the signatures are loose. Pages in
both volumes are left blank.
505  1       ⚭av.1. Memoranda relating to management of Brown's farm, Portage Co., Ohio,
1838-1845. -- v.2. Chronology of correspondence with abolitionists and records of the Free
State Regular Volunteers of Kansas; 1855-1859.
600  10      ⚭aBrown, John,⚭d1800-1859⚭vManuscripts.
650  0       ⚭aAntislavery movements⚭zUnited States.
651  0       ⚭aOhio⚭xHistory⚭y1787-1865.
651  0       ⚭aKansas⚭xHistory⚭y1854-1861.
655  0       ⚭aDigital images.
856  40      ⚭uhttp://www.archive.org/details/memoranumsicbook01brow⚭zv.1: Click here to
view digitized item.⚭xDigitized by Internet Archive on Mon Jul 06 15:38:34 -0400 2009
856  40      ⚭uhttp://www.archive.org/details/memoranumsicbook02brow⚭zv.2: Click here to
view digitized item.⚭xDigitized by Internet Archive on Mon Jul 06 15:39:13 -0400 2009
914          ⚭a3347148
993          ⚭aBPL⚭bBOR⚭cBOR
993          ⚭a1⚭bBRLRBM⚭cBRef
```

- Name of creator comes from a list maintained by the Library of Congress. Titles formulated according to detailed rules

- "subject headings" are indexing terms that bring similar resources together. Headings maintained by Library of Congress

Questions?



# New Business

**BOSTON  
PUBLIC  
LIBRARY**



# Public Comment

**BOSTON  
PUBLIC  
LIBRARY**



- If follow up is required, please send your contact email or phone number to the Clerk of the Board at [pcarver@bpl.org](mailto:pcarver@bpl.org)
- People will be chosen in the order they were received and allowed 2 minutes to speak.
- The Moderator will unmute your mic when you are called on.
- Comments made in chat during meeting will not be acknowledged.