

BOSTON PUBLIC LIBRARY SPECIAL COLLECTIONS COMMITTEE MEETING

**Thursday, May 7, 2015 at 8:30 a.m.
Central Library, Copley Square
Norman B. Leventhal Map Center Conference Room
700 Boylston Street, Boston, MA**

MINUTES

A meeting of the Boston Public Library Trustees Special Collections Committee was held at the Boston Public Library, Central Library, Copley Square, Norman B. Leventhal Map Center Conference Room, 700 Boylston Street, Boston, MA on Thursday, May 7, 2015 at 8:30 a.m.

Present at the meeting were: Committee Chair William Stoneman, and Committee Members: Mr. Stanley Cushing, Ms. Cheryl Nixon, Ms. Elizabeth “Lillie” Johnson, Mr. Vincent Petronella, Ms. Vivian Spiro, Ms. Muffy Glauber, Ms. Brenda Lawson, and BPL President Amy Ryan. . Also in attendance were BPL staff: Ms. Laura Irscher, Ms. Karen Shafts, Ms. Eve Griffin, Ms. Jane Winton, Mr. Sean Casey, and Ms. Deborah Kirrane. Committee member Mr. Jarvis Kellogg was present via teleconference, who confirmed for the Committee that, pursuant to the terms of the Massachusetts Open Meeting law, he would not be able to vote on any of the agenda items before the Committee.

Special Collections Committee Chair William Stoneman presided, and the meeting was called to order at 8:35 a.m.

Chair Stoneman began the meeting by asking that all Committee members introduce themselves, before asking that Amy Ryan deliver remarks. After introductions, Ms. Ryan explained that due to the lack of a quorum at the last meeting, held on September 25, 2014, there are no official minutes for the Committee to vote to approve. There are, however, notes of the September 25, 2014 meeting which the Committee members may use for reference. Ms. Ryan further explained that since the September 25, 2014 meeting, certain items presented at the meeting have changed.

Specifically, while the Committee endorsed the approval of three acquisitions at the September 25, 2014 meeting, the BPL has since placed all major acquisitions on hold pending a complete inventory project scheduled to take place during the summer of 2015. Thus, the three proposed acquisitions are no longer being considered for purchase. Ms. Ryan did point out that the Nancy Webb bequest, reviewed at the September 25, 2014 meeting, however will be presented to the Committee for consideration at the present meeting.

Mr. Stoneman addressed Agenda item III: Collections of Distinction, and explained that the Committee would consider three proposed collections at the present meeting. Mr. Stoneman informed the Committee that future meetings will address the goals of the Collections of Distinction program, and not necessarily just the collections for consideration.

Laura Irscher, Chief of Collections Strategy referred Committee members to printed copies of criteria for Collections of Distinction, as well as a list of current Collections of Distinction.

Jane Winton, Curator of Prints, presented the first proposed Collection of Distinction: Louis Prang and Company. She described personal background information of Louis Prang and described him as the “Father of the American Christmas Card.”

Committee members were shown examples of Prang’s lithography and chromographic work. One of the rarer items in the collection, a gold-over-sterling wreath presented to Prang by his employees on the occasion of his 25th anniversary, was shown to the Committee, as well as a collection of medals awarded to Prang.

Ms. Winton pointed out that the Prang factory is still in existence at the corner of Roxbury and Washington Streets, and the house where he once lived is right next door. The BPL has digitized 1,400 items of the collection and receives many requests for them. Prang believed that anyone could succeed, regardless of their beginnings, and he felt that art should be made available to all.

The Boston Public Library is the only public institution with this large a collection of Prang’s works.

Upon motion made and duly seconded, the Committee voted to recommend that Louis Prang and Company be identified as a Boston Public Library Collection of Distinction.

VOTED: “that, the Boston Public Library Trustees Special Collections Committee recommend to the Trustees of the Public Library of the City of Boston, that Louis Prang and Company be Identified as a Boston Public Library Collection of Distinction.”

Mr. Stoneman reminded the Committee of the large amount of work performed by the curatorial staff in researching and preparing items for consideration.

Sean Casey, Reference Librarian, Special Collections, presented the next Collection of Distinction candidate to the Committee: the Nathaniel Bowditch Collection. He described the types of items in the collection: medieval manuscripts, first editions, correspondence from and to US presidents and famous scientists. The collection is directly related to the history of the Boston Public Library. It was the first collection ever received by the BPL, in 1858, and Bowditch’s own son helped acquire the land upon which the BPL was first built. Another Bowditch son contributed \$500 a year toward the collection and, upon his death, bequeathed \$10,000 to the BPL for the collection.

The Bowditch Collection consists of both manuscripts and rare books. Mr. Casey highlighted a letter in the collection which Bowditch received from Thomas Jefferson, asking that Bowditch teach at the University of Virginia. Other items in the collection include journals of five voyages, scientific manuscripts, and a first edition of *The New American Navigator*.

Ms. Lawson indicated that the Massachusetts Historical Society also has a large collection of Bowditch materials, but none of his books. The BPL has over 10,000 volumes of Bowditch materials.

Mr. Stoneman described the Bowditch collection as one of “the best of all possible terms.” It is a key founding collection, part history of Boston, part building of the BPL and its relation to other Boston institutions. It contains a variety of material and high level of personal involvement; a great collection. Mr. Casey indicated that Bowditch materials are being digitized and that there is a catalog of the collection.

Upon motion made and duly seconded, the Committee voted to recommend that Nathaniel Bowditch Collection be identified as a Boston Public Library Collection of Distinction.

VOTED: “that, the Boston Public Library Trustees Special Collections Committee recommend to the Trustees of the Public Library of the City of Boston, that The Nathaniel Bowditch Collection be Identified as Boston Public Library Collection of Distinction.”

Eve Griffin, Curator of Fine Arts presented the Society of Arts and Crafts, Boston Records Collection to the Committee for consideration. The Society of Boston Arts and Crafts still exists today on Newbury Street, Boston. The first Arts and Crafts exhibition in America was held in Boston in 1897, after which The Society of Arts and Crafts was formed.

The collection includes organizational and financial records, publicity material, correspondence, price lists, and photographs of early works. The papers document the first non-profit arts and crafts organization in America. It is the only collection that includes arts and crafts contributions from New England. The material in the collection lends itself to a very strong exhibition.

Mr. Petronella asked when Dedham Pottery – part of the collection – became associated with West Concord. Ms. Griffin will research this and provide Mr. Petronella with an answer to his question.

Upon motion made and duly seconded, the Committee voted to recommend that Society of Arts and Crafts, Boston Records, be identified as a Boston Public Library Collection of Distinction.

VOTED: “that, the Boston Public Library Trustees Special Collections Committee recommend to the Trustees of the Public Library of the City of Boston, that the Society of Arts and Crafts Society, Boston Records, be Identified as Boston Public Library Collection of Distinction.”

Karen Shafts, Assistant Keeper of Prints presented background of and materials from the Nancy McIvor Webb Trust bequest, to the Committee. Nancy Webb was a local Boston artist from Cambridge who lived from 1926 to 2012. She was a printmaker and sculptor. The BPL began collecting her prints in 1987, hosted a retrospective of her drawings in 1998 and, published a catalog of her works. Currently the BPL has 17 Webb pieces from 1973 to 1990 in its collection. The bequest would complete the entire span of her career – to 2009.

Ms. Shafts reported that a complete inventory of Webb’s works will be conducted during the summer and, by year end, all pieces will be appropriately matted and stored. There is \$25,000 as part of the bequest to support the cost of transporting, housing, conserving, matting, and purchasing storage boxes.

The Webb collection is part of the Boston Artists Collection – a Collection of Distinction. Her works are pen and ink, graphite, and woodcuts, and the bequest is appraised at \$111,525. Ms. Shafts referred the Committee to the items displayed on easels throughout the room. There are no restrictions on the materials.

Upon motion made and duly seconded, the Committee voted to recommend that the Trustees of the Boston Public Library accept the Nancy McIvor Webb Trust bequest of drawings and prints, together with the monetary sum of \$25,000.

VOTED: “that, the Boston Public Library Trustees Special Collections Committee recommend that the Trustees of the Public Library of the City of Boston, accept The Nancy McIvor Webb Trust Bequest of Drawings and Prints, together with the sum of twenty-five thousand dollars (\$25,000), pursuant to the terms of the Nancy McIvor Webb Trust, Amendment 1, section A(b) and the terms of the Boston Public Library Collection Development Policy.”

Ms. Ryan presented Agenda item V: Exhibition Loan Policy and Procedures. She thanked the Committee, on behalf of the Trustees, for their work in developing the documents and went on to explain the changes and/or additions the Trustees made to the policy. Massachusetts institutions would be given higher priority for potential collaboration and the BPL does not loan items for purpose of commercial gain, either for itself or for the borrowing institution.

The loan approval process was changed in that the BPL President may authorize, with Special Collection Committee recommendation, loans valued up to \$50,000. Requests over \$50,000 will be authorized by Trustees based on Special Collection Committee’s and BPL President’s recommendation.

Ms. Lawson asked whether any language regarding long term loans should be added to the policy. Ms. Ryan replied that this was a good point, but that the procedures did reflect the handling of long term loans. Ms. Lawson described some of the advantages of long term loans, namely that materials can be displayed and housed appropriately and that a collection can receive a lot of attention. Ms. Johnson added that she was not in favor of long term loans, but that if they do exist, the loans should be visited and monitored periodically by a BPL representative.

Ms. Lawson further suggested the addition of language stating that loan requests will not conflict with the BPL’s own exhibition plan. Ms. Ryan thanked all for their suggestions.

Due to the particularly rough winter weather and the subsequent meeting cancellations, the Committee was unable to meet earlier in the year to review two loan requests. Absent meeting with the Committee, Ms. Ryan, in consultation with Mr. Stoneman and Jeffrey Rudman, Chair of the Board of Trustees, decided the two loan requests at issue would be approved. Both were important and timely loans to Massachusetts institutions, and met the criteria set forth in the Loan Policy. Accordingly, the loan of one (1) object to the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum for the period of March 12, 2015 to September 7, 2015 for purposes of *Jean-Michel Othoniel: Secret Flower Sculptures*, and the loan of fifteen (15) objects to University Art Gallery,

University of Massachusetts – Dartmouth, for the period of April 16, 2015 to May 1, 2015 for purposes of *Working Women Artists and Modern American Visual Culture (1885-1940)* were approved.

Ms. Shafts next addressed Agenda item VI, a pending loan request from the Davis Museum at Wellesley College, for four named lithographs and a woodcut for the exhibition entitled “*The Krieg Cycle: Käthe Kollwitz and World War I.*” Ms. Shafts confirmed that all necessary loan paperwork was in place and the BPL has worked previously with Wellesley College.

Upon motion made and duly seconded, the Committee approved the pending loan request made by The Davis Museum at Wellesley College, of listed items for purposes of its exhibition entitled “*The Krieg Cycle: Käthe Kollwitz and World War I.*”

VOTED: “that, pursuant to the terms of the Exhibition Loan Policy, the Boston Public Library Trustees Special Collections Committee recommends that the President of the Boston Public Library approve the Loan of five (5) objects to The Davis Museum at Wellesley College, 106 Central Street, Wellesley, MA 01481 for period September 16, 2015 to December 20, 2015, for purposes of The Krieg Cycle: Kathe Kollwitz and World War I.”

Mr. Stoneman next asked the Committee their thoughts concerning the meeting schedule for 2015-2016. The Committee meets on Thursdays for the convenience of a majority of members, and needs to meet regularly. Mr. Stoneman asked what may be done so that meetings may easily be attending going forward. Suggestions from the Committee included scheduling a meeting later than September, and scheduling a second meeting in April. Another suggestion was to move the February meeting to March. Ms. Ryan pointed out that there may be a summer’s worth of work to be addressed by the Committee in September.

Ms. Lawson has a regularly scheduled meeting on the dates proposed for the Special Collections Committee, and perhaps the dates may be moved by a week so that she may attend.

The Committee will next meet on September 24, 2015 at 8:30 a.m. and, between now and September, a suitable schedule will be worked out.

Mr. Stoneman asked for New Business to be placed before the Committee and Ms. Lawson asked whether loan fees were going to be charged by the BPL. Ms. Ryan confirmed that loan fees would not be charged.

Mr. Stoneman stated that since the loan policy was established, and that the Committee had identified a number of Collections of Distinction, the September 24, 2015 meeting should be devoted less to transactional items and more to members thinking of the larger vision and mission of the Boston Public Library, and the role of special collections in that mission. He described for the Committee the ongoing Central Library Renovation and encouraged members to visit the second floor of the Johnson Building.

Mr. Stoneman said that at the start of the next academic year, it behooves the Committee to think about what it wants to do versus just reviewing material. The members were encouraged to think

about what the Committee wants to accomplish. How many Collections of Distinction are ideal? What is being left out? What about the importance of consistency?

Ms. Ryan encouraged the members to visit the Map Center Exhibition: "We Are One."

Mr. Kellogg asked that the meeting materials be sent to him via mail, and Ms. Johnson would like to receive a list of the members of the Committee.

With no further business before the Special Collections Committee, the meeting was adjourned at 9:40 a.m.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Deborah A. Kirrane". The signature is written in dark ink and is positioned above the typed name.

Deborah A. Kirrane
Clerk of the Board