

TRUSTEES OF THE PUBLIC LIBRARY OF THE CITY OF BOSTON

**Tuesday, October 13, 2015 at 8:30 a.m.
Central Library, Copley Square
Commonwealth Salon
700 Boylston Street, Boston, MA**

NOTES OF MEETING

A meeting of the Boston Public Library Trustees Special Collections Committee was held at the Boston Public Library, Central Library, Copley Square, Commonwealth Salon, 700 Boylston Street, Boston, MA on Tuesday, October 13, 2015 at 8:30 a.m.

Present at the meeting were: Committee Chair William Stoneman, and Committee Members: Mr. Brian Clancy, Mr. Stanley Cushing, Ms. Brenda Lawson, Rep. Byron Rushing, Ms. Vivian Spiro, and BPL Interim President David Leonard. BPL staff in attendance: Ms. Laura Irmscher, Ms. Beth Prindle, Mr. Michael Colford, and Ms. Deborah Kirrane. Committee member Ms. Susan Abbott was present via teleconference. Ms. Abbott had been instructed prior to meeting that, pursuant to terms of the Massachusetts Open Meeting law, she would not be able to vote on any agenda items before the Committee.

Special Collections Committee Chair William Stoneman presided, and the meeting was called to order at 8:38 a.m. He advised that the meeting was one member short of a quorum and moved the vote to accept the minute of the May 7, 2015 meeting to later in the agenda in the hope that additional Committee members may join the meeting. Mr. Stoneman introduced BPL Interim President David Leonard. Mr. Leonard addressed those in attendance.

Mr. Leonard described his role as Interim President of the Boston Public Library, as one of ensuring that the BPL moves forward with its initiatives over the coming year, that it deals with underlying problems which, while not a surprise to BPL, received a thorough airing in the press during the spring of 2015, and that BPL delivers on major goals it has set for itself including the Johnson renovation (due for completion in summer 2016), and supporting the search process for a new BPL president. Mr. Leonard reported that John Palfrey has been selected by Mayor Walsh to lead an external search committee for the new BPL president, a request for proposals for an executive search firm has been issued, a search committee is currently being formed, and that the search process is expected to take nine to twelve months to complete.

Mr. Leonard pointed to the current work of the Prints and Special Collections Department, and the recent mold outbreak in the Rare Departments. He stated that BPL has been focused on dealing with both systemic and specific problems in these areas over the last six months, and states that these are multi-year projects and cannot be dealt with overnight. He stated that BPL is emerging from these challenges stronger, with a clearer sense of what needs to be done, and how these challenges may best be addressed.

Mr. Leonard reported that Susan Glover, on administrative leave since spring 2015, is no longer employed by the BPL and, because this is a personnel matter, it will not be addressed further.

Mr. Leonard announced that Beth Prindle has been appointed Acting Keeper of Special Collections. BPL is beginning to review staffing levels related to all Special Collections areas, understanding that strong management skills, deep curatorial expertise, library skills and knowledge of facilities are needed. BPL Board of Trustees, Special Collection Committee members, the Foundation, Associates, and Map Center, are all key partners in assisting the BPL in moving forward.

Mr. Stoneman encouraged the Committee to discuss the serious issues facing the BPL with Mr. Leonard as BPL moves forward. Mr. Clancy pointed to the component of the Compass principles focused on collections of distinction and collections management work, as representative of the BPL's commitment to special collections. He asked if BPL was still committed to these same dedicated goals and objectives.

Mr. Leonard stated that the Compass is robust, strong, represents great community process and work, and accordingly has set a strong foundation. Past BPL practices included a large focus on acquisition and less focus on other critical requirements of stewardship. Current practice does not represent a change in direction, but fulfilling other requirements of stewardship: cataloging, digitization, accessibility (online, exhibitions, educational programs). Mr. Leonard pointed to his conversations with Mayor Walsh in which the Mayor wants to continue to make the BPL the best library in the country. It is up to BPL staff and its advisors to determine how this work is done and what it is going to cost.

Mr. Clancy spoke to the dramatic differences in funding levels at what David McCullough has termed "the five greatest libraries in America" – highlighting the disparity that exists in funding between the BPL and peer institutions. Mr. Clancy wants to see an alignment between level of resources and staff expectations. Mr. Leonard replied that reviewing how other institutions provide appropriate stewardship and the scope of the BPL collection where it stands today, will guide what resources are needed. It will take the city, the state, the BPL and its partners, to come together and make necessary funding a reality. Mr. Stoneman explained that the Special Collection Committee will be paying more attention to what the BPL, the city, and the Mayor are going to do to address recent challenges at the BPL.

Ms. Lawson recognized that in the past the emphasis of the Special Collections Committee was on acquisitions. She would like, at this point, for the Committee to have more of a voice in these critical issues, pointing to the experience and expertise of the Committee members. Mr. Leonard suggested that, given the changing role of the Committee as discussed, an opportunity may exist for the Committee to provide additional expertise to further support the BPL.

Mr. Cushing asked Mr. Leonard what Committee members could do to be more helpful. Mr. Leonard replied that he welcomed each member's individual input and expertise, but that during the interim period, perhaps the Committee Charter should be reviewed by the Committee and the Board of Trustees. Ms. Imscher added that she would appreciate input from individuals and from the Committee on the staffing, storage, environmental, etc., challenges that the BPL is facing. She and Ms. Prindle are reaching out to other institutions to determine best practices and to learn from the experience of others.

Ms. Spiro would like all Committee members to become advocates for the collections, and she pointed to two board members of the Associates in attendance. Members should be informing the public as to what is at the BPL, why is it here, what purpose do the collections serve, who uses, them, why are they important, why should people give money to preserve, staff, and make them accessible? She would like an ‘elevator speech’ developed that makes three points in two minutes, convincing people to help.

Mr. Leonard expressed that the Collections of Distinction is a great way to focus on those items of the BPL’s 23 million items, that are truly special and interesting. The recent inventory organization work has identified 685 special collections. Is this too many? Are the items the right ones?

Rep. Rushing explained that the Board of Trustee expects the Committee to (1) be qualified enough so that the Trustees may delegate decisions to Committees to approve, and (2) advise the Trustees in the given area of expertise. The Trustees rely upon the Committee to report on what needs to be changed and/or emphasized, knowing that issues have been properly vetted and discussed by the Committees.

Ms. Irmshcher introduced Beth Prindle, BPL’s Acting Head of Special Collections. Ms. Prindle began her BPL career over ten years ago in the Rare Books Department when she served as curator of the John Adams Library, and is an asset to the BPL.

Jan Spitz, Executive Director of the Norman B. Leventhal Map Center, explained that Curator Ron Grim recently discovered a map, believed to have been stolen from the BPL, in an auction catalogue. The map was one of 70 maps, identified as stolen by convicted map thief, Forbes Smiley. Together with Caroline Driscoll, City of Boston Law Department, Mr. Grim traveled to New York to examine the actual map in question, confirmed that it was, indeed, a map stolen from the BPL, and the map will now be returned to the Map Center. Mr. Leonard commended Mr. Grim on his diligence and efforts in recovering the map. Mr. Stoneman remarked that the BPL and the Map Center were both forthright in acknowledging that the maps had been stolen, and that there is a need for continued due diligence so that dealers know that this type of theft is not acceptable.

Mr. Stoneman reported that Committee Member Vincent Petronella has resigned from the Committee, based upon him feeling that he was no longer able to make the necessary commitment. Mr. Stoneman thanked Mr. Petronella publicly for his service, stated that he would be missed, and remarked as to Mr. Petronella’s thoughtful, careful, and accurate consideration of meeting minutes. Going forward, Mr. Stoneman would like to have the composition of the Committee reviewed as there are often challenges in attendance.

Ms. Irmshcher reported on the recent mold outbreak in the Rare Books Department. The mold was first noticed on a volume in the reading room on September 14, and an immediate survey discovered mold in other areas of the department. Relative humidity in the space was at 70% due to the extraordinarily warm weather. Staff was immediately moved to other locations and Rare Books Department was closed and will remain closed for a period of five to ten weeks. Twenty dehumidifiers were rented and the humidity is now under control. OccuHealth continues

to test air quality and surfaces, and Polygon continues the cleaning process it started on September 28. While this type of outbreak is not an uncommon occurrence at libraries, it is important that a plan be in place for spring 2016, and BPL is working on long-term solutions. Past occurrences of mold were limited, isolated, and contained. Ms. Irmischer confirmed that BPL does have a disaster plan in place.

The Map Center has appropriate, dedicated, climate controls, but the rest of Central Library does not. There was to be a capital project for a dedicated HVAC system for the Rare Books Department, but that project was not funded over the past several years. Facilities Capital Planning work is to be done to access exactly what is needed. Currently BPL has a 40-year old system which is inadequate to address particularly hot and humid weather, along with an active construction site.

Ms. Prindle described the three-step process of cleaning: all six sides of every volume is HEPA vacuumed, wiped clean with a dry sponge, and HEPA vacuumed again. All shelves, walls, furniture, are also HEPA vacuumed. In addition to eliminating the mold, accumulated dust and dirt are also being eliminated and BPL has a good condition, clean, collection for moving forward. Currently there are 20 dehumidifiers in place and air scrubbers that circulate the air at the rate of four times an hour. Twenty Polygon workers, in teams of two, perform the cleaning work and are supervised by BPL staff. BPL Facilities Department is installing special filters in the ducts supplying air to the affected area and long-term solutions for addressing environmental issues are to be worked out. Mr. Leonard explained that clean-up funding is coming from BPL's and construction company's insurance policies.

Mr. Stoneman stated that it is critical for Special Collections Committee to work with Mr. Leonard and BPL staff to help determine long-term solutions and advocate for same, reminding the Board of Trustees that optimal environmental controls are absolutely essential and part of any plan for moving forward. Rep. Rushing asked that Special Collections Committee and BPL staff educate Trustees as to what other institutions do in these types of situations, stating that such information would be helpful.

Ms. Irmischer described the Print Department's print inventory project that began in spring 2015, led by Simmons College professor Martha Mahard. Ms. Mahard was hired in 2014 to access the entire print collection, and her report of that work was finalized May 2015. Since then, she and her team are conducting an inventory of every item in the collection, excluding photographs. She and her team of student interns worked diligently over the past summer.

It is significant to note the different levels of information regarding each item, and how that information is kept. Most information is on catalog cards, but information can also be found on invoices or smaller spreadsheets. Interns go through each box, determine contents, and match the contents to BPL records. When the inventory is complete, for the first time, BPL will have a listing of every item in the print collection.

While summer of 2015 saw a volunteer team conducting the inventory, BPL has now shifted to paid workers in an effort to maximize productivity and ensure appropriate art history skill levels. The inventory is expected to be 90% completed in spring 2016 and Prints Department remains

closed during this work. BPL has not discovered another institution to have embarked on such an inventory. Messes. Irmischer and Prindle will be visiting other institutions in the near future to see how others are organizing their collections and what staffing and storage models are used, in an effort to learn best practices and lessons learned from others.

By pausing print acquisitions and redirecting print funds where appropriate and allowable, is providing the monies to support the print inventory project.

Ms. Irmischer reported that she is very pleased with the spreadsheet being created as a result of the print inventory project, as it records exactly those items in each box. Movement of items is limited as the inventory is more focused on recording items so that they may be located easily. The inventory will inform just how wonderful the collection really is. Mr. Colford cited the inventory as a useful tool in developing the “digital stacks” being created as part of the Johnson Building Renovation.

Ms. Irmischer distributed “Special Collections Assessment Project Plan” and asked that all members review the document. She described BPL’s plan to hire a consultant with expertise in special collections to develop a project plan to describe, organize, inventory, and catalog special collections at BPL. Currently different departments use the term “special collections” to refer to different things, and BPL needs to exactly define the term. BPL has currently identified 685 collections termed “special collections.” Ms. Irmischer asked committee members to please contact her and offer their thoughts and experience, particularly in how other institutions define a “special collection.” Ms. Lawson indicated that she would welcome the opportunity to assist, as did Mr. Cushing.

Ms. Spiro pointed to the assistance provided the Map Center by CCAHA in developing its preservation plan and providing global, scholarly, and curatorial oversight to Map Center’s collection. Ms. Lawson pointed to a LSTA program offered through Massachusetts Board of Library Commissioners whereby BPL could apply for preservation grant assistance with certain projects. Mr. Leonard welcomed all ideas and outreach and explained that BPL is in touch with Harvard, Yale, and New York Public Library to lean how peer institutions address these same issues.

Mr. Stoneman would like to see BPL explore other alternatives before spending money on a year-long consultancy. As BPL visits other libraries, staff will discover what is particular to BPL and what is not. Many issues being faced relate to the general shift in how libraries are used and the importance and prevalence of digitization. He voiced concern that some proposed consultant work may be done by BPL staff.

Moving to Pending Loan Requests portion of the agenda, Ms. Irmischer reported that BPL Trustees approved Norman B. Leventhal Map Center’s loan request for the *Map of the Operations at the Siege of Savannah in 1779*, to Colonial Williamsburg for period February 2016 to January 2017 for purposes of We Are One exhibition. Ms. Spitz described the success of the We Are One exhibition and that the same exhibition will open in Colonial Williamsburg in February 2016. As is required, all climate control, lighting, and security stipulations for the item have been met.

Ms. Prindle addressed the pending loan request from McMullen Museum of Art at Boston College. The anticipated pending request for medieval manuscripts is part of a 3-site exhibition. Houghton (Harvard), McMullen (Boston College), and Gardner Museum will each host early, middle, and late period items, respectively. Mr. Stoneman offered a further description of the exhibition which opens in approximately September 2015. The exhibition has been in the works, with the help of Boston Public Library Associates, for the past five years. Almost 280 manuscripts in the exhibition have been catalogued and digitized. Exhibition planners are working with scholars throughout the world who are stunned at the materials in Boston and at BPL in particular. The exhibition will include a 600-page catalogue and website containing digital images to exist in perpetuity.

Ms. Prindle thanked the Associates for their efforts in cataloging this collection and funding of same. Next steps include digitization and conservation of the 33 items expected to be loaned for the exhibition.

In terms of process, when Special Collection Committee next meets, it will need to review the loan request and recommend same to Board of Trustees for approval, based on the appraised value of each item. The full slate of the loan request, and the appraised values, will be before this Committee at their next meeting. Mr. Stoneman again reiterated the importance of meeting attendance, as anything less than a quorum in attendance would prevent the Committee from voting to approve and/or recommend for approval the loan request.

Ms. Irmischer explained that the Exhibition Loan Policy whereby items worth less than \$50,000 are recommended to BPL President for approval and those worth more than \$50,000 require Trustee approval, was adopted by BPL Trustees in January 2015. The policy provides BPL with detail around appraised value of items.

Mr. Stoneman said that BPL is months ahead of other institutions involved in loaning items for the exhibition. He believes exhibition will bring more attention to BPL and its collections.

Mr. Stoneman said that he will work with BPL staff to determine next meeting dates. He asked that email informational updates be sent to committee members regularly to keep all engaged.

With no further business, and no quorum reached, the meeting adjourned at 10:02 a.m.

Respectfully submitted,



Deborah Kirrane, Clerk of the Board