

TRUSTEES OF THE PUBLIC LIBRARY OF THE CITY OF BOSTON

**Meeting of the Trustees Special Collections Committee
Thursday, May 19, 2016 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 was held in the Commonwealth Salon at the Boston Public Library, 700 Boylston Street, Boston, MA on Thursday, May 19, 2016 at 8:30 a.m.

Present at the meeting were: Committee Chair William Stoneman, and Committee Members: Brian Clancy, Stanley Cushing, Cheryl Nixon, Elizabeth “Lillie” Johnson, Vivian Spiro, Muffy Glauber, Rep. Byron Rushing, and BPL Interim President, David Leonard. Also in attendance were BPL staff: Chief of Collections Strategy Laura Irmscher, Keeper of Special Collections Beth Prindle, and Clerk of the Board Deborah Kirrane, Boston Public Library staff and members of the public.

Special Collections Committee Chair William Stoneman presided, called the meeting to order at 8:35 a.m., and addressed the order of business. Mr. Stoneman called for a review of the Meeting Minutes of February 11, 2016. Mr. Clancy offered edits relative to the minutes and offered comments regarding the transitional leadership team at the BPL, remarking that it feels less like a transition and more like a renaissance. He thanked members of the Committee for their extraordinary work and, upon motion duly made and seconded, the Minutes of the February 11, 2016 Meeting were approved.

Mr. Stoneman provided an update on “Beyond Words – Illuminated Manuscripts from Boston-area Collections,” the upcoming exhibition in which items from BPL collections will be featured. The exhibition includes 18 institutions, three venues, and 260 manuscripts. The catalog is in final stages, will soon be going to press, and exhibition advertising will soon commence. The exhibition website will soon be launched and related programming announced. Mr. Stoneman is pleased that BPL is playing a prominent, leading, role in the exhibition.

Laura Irmscher, BPL Chief of Collections Strategy next presented the Special Collections Report. Ms. Irmscher provided an update on environmental conditions within the Rare Books Department. Dehumidifiers are positioned and readied to allow optimum conditions over the summer, as well as tools to monitor and record data so that appropriate changes and modifications may be made immediately when needed. BPL will soon launch a capital project to replace the HVAC in Rare Books. Architect Finegold Alexander has been selected and a kick-off meeting has been held.

Ms. Spiro asked if Rare Books would be closed at all while improvements are being made. Ms. Irmscher replied that the department planned to conduct business as usual and that any closure or restricted access decisions would be made once the design process had been completed.

Mr. Leonard confirmed that the BPL is approved to perform the work under the capital budget for environmental improvements at Central Library, representing an additional commitment from the City of Boston with respect to responding Special Collection needs. The design phase will take place during the summer with anticipated activity to begin in spring 2017. The project will be paid for by the City of Boston Capital Project funding. The project will address mechanical systems on the 7th floor of the Johnson Building, in the basement, and ductwork in other spaces.

Additional doors are being added in the space between the Arts Department and the Rare Books Department to further eliminate detrimental air flow to Rare Books and provide temporary cooling in room outside of Rare Books lobby to help address the brunt of humidity and high temperatures.

Rep. Rushing asked if, at the next Special Collections meeting, the Committee walk through the affected spaces.

Ms. Prindle reported on ‘Gallery J’ print shows. The new gallery will be located on the first floor of the Johnson Building, and will be a central part of the space as opposed to simply an add-on. Challenges often exist in displaying items from the Special Collections. They require a protected environment, specific temperature and lighting needs. In the corridor before the elevators past Deferrari Hall, there is almost 80 feet of wall space in which museum quality cases will be installed as part of the Central Library renovation allowing for the rotating display of items from the collections. An announcement regarding the inaugural display of items related to the BPL Print Department will soon be made. The exhibition will highlight three areas of print making: woodcuts, engravings and chromolithography. Ms. Prindle especially thanked Mr. and Mrs. Brian and Susan Clancy for funding the first exhibition.

The cases have depth allowing shelves and mounting system to hold most standard sized books and folios. Map Center standards were reviewed when designing the cases.

Mr. Leonard explained ‘Gallery J’ stands for ‘Gallery Johnson’ and that a conversation regarding naming opportunities will eventually be brought before the Board of Trustees. While not official or necessarily desirable, ‘Johnson’ is the working name of the building, adopted for better or worse.

Mr. Leonard described the display of reproductions throughout the renovated space, and the installation of the digital stacks, as opportunities that recognize the special collections. The digital stacks project prominently displays digitized collections in an interactive manner, allowing the collections to be explored in a whimsical way. The digital stacks will have space in which a physical object will be displayed next to the digital environment.

Throughout the renovated spaces will be original and reproductions from the BPL collections, including busts, particularly those related to writing and fiction. A bust of Maya Angelou was recently purchased to accompany a series of historic busts, and will be displayed in the renovated space. Reproduced travel posters will be displayed in the Learning Center, and photographs will be displayed throughout the Kirstein Business Library and Innovation Center.

In regard to the Shakespeare exhibition, it will begin in October 2016. The opening reception date is the evening of October 13, and the exhibition will open to the public on October 14. The BPL has undergone the full appraisal process with the assistance of Stuart Bennett, and recognizes the value of the Shakespeare folio – published after Shakespeare’s death – and the lifetime quartos, those plays published during Shakespeare’s life, of which only eight or fewer are known to exist in the world. Deliberate decisions about security and environmental concerns have been made, and the BPL is grateful for the Norman B. Leventhal Map Center for the use of their specially designed display cases.

Reporting on behalf of the Map Center, Ron Grim described the exhibition “Mapping Shakespeare’s World” which will showcase maps and illustrations that document the places and settings of Shakespeare’s plays. The items are coming from the Map Center collection and include maps of Norway, Denmark, Sweden, and images of Hamlet’s castle.

Mr. Stoneman described that each exhibition has an appraisal built in as part of the process, whether an internal exhibition or an exhibition loan. An unintended consequence of the display of material is that a variety of material is appraised over time, helping all to realize the actual value of the material.

Mr. Leonard noted that programming will be added related to the Shakespeare exhibition, especially a collaboration with the Abby Theater from Ireland in the fall.

In addressing the next item on the Agenda: Rare Books Department Positions and Staffing, Mr. Leonard thanked the Associates of the Boston Public Library for their continued help in conservation and digitization of BPL collections.

The City of Boston’s proposed operating budget has gone before City Council and before June 30, the City Council will vote on whether to approve the overall budget. Mr. Leonard reported the budget is a maintenance budget, incorporating increased contractual costs so that existing services and personnel may continue to be supported. Mr. Leonard described the Mayor’s commitment to additional staffing in the Special Collections area, in conjunction with a match from the Associates. Ms. Spiro is hoping the City will rise to the occasion and the efforts of the Associates will lead to the increase hoped for.

In regard to the State budget, Mr. Leonard thanked Rep. Rushing for his efforts and leadership and reported that the Senate is currently dealing with its side. Rep. Rushing encouraged all to call their state senator in support of the amendments that support libraries (9401).

Ms. Prindle announced that the City of Boston has funded a position: Curator of Rare Books, a position that has not existed for some years. Jay Moschella has been appointed to the role and brings valuable knowledge, experience, background expertise, and enthusiasm. The Committee asked that Mr. Moschella attend the next meeting of the Special Collections Committee.

Ms. Spiro recommended the vacant Rare Books cataloger position, funded by the Associates, be filled as soon as possible. It is important to have items cataloged and brought on line, especially in light of the digital stack installations.

Mr. Stoneman suggested that the next meeting of the Special Collections Committee include a walk through the renovated spaces and Rare Books Department so that all can have a better understanding of spaces and the impact of improvements and exhibitions on same.

Mr. Stoneman asked that the next meeting also include an organizational chart of Special Collection and Rare Book staffing, reflecting the funding source of each position, with an eye toward building an effective team and maximizing investments. Mr. Grim commented that changing exhibitions often requires additional staffing.

In addressing the New Business portion of the meeting, Mr. Clancy asked that the Committee reflect on how it can have an impact on what is an inflection point for the BPL. The Committee charge calls for an Annual Report to the Trustees, which should be used to showcase and celebrate what is happening as well as identifying major challenges going forward. He further suggested members of the Committee attend the next Trustee meeting and present the challenges and opportunities that exist in Special Collections and Rare Books and discuss what it will take from Trustees, City, State, and private entities to bridge funding gaps and realize its potential.

Mr. Stoneman described the public comment portion of the Trustees meetings that he attended, and suggested at least one member of the Committee be present at every Trustee meeting and inform on what the Committee is doing, what it is focused on, and the goals and the challenges that exist. He further asked that a schedule of Trustee meetings be sent to members of the Special Collections Committee.

Ms. Nixon commented that the BPL is performing a unique mission in showcasing physical and digital access to items in a very public context, and asked that this work be presented to the public – loudly and clearly – in an effort to gain awareness and opportunities for funding.

Mr. Stoneman would like to see presentations of physical objects take place at Trustees meetings, with staff explanations of why it has or should be digitized and/or physically displayed. The world is so virtual that people are now craving the physical.

As a Trustee committee, members of the Special Collections Committee may appear as an item on the Agenda and should, accordingly, do so.

Mr. Leonard, in conclusion, commented that while this has been a year of transition, the BPL has made progress. He was privileged to work with the Committee.

Mr. Stoneman thanked Mr. Leonard for his work as Interim President.

The Committee will next meet on Thursday, September 8, 2016 at 8:30 a.m.

With no further business, upon motion made and duly seconded, the meeting was adjourned at 9:45 a.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Deborah Kirrane, Clerk of the Board
Laura Irmscher, Chief of Collections Strategy