

TRUSTEES OF THE PUBLIC LIBRARY OF THE CITY OF BOSTON

Meeting of the Trustees Special Collections Committee

Tuesday, October 18, 2016, 8:30 a.m.
Commonwealth Salon, Central Library
Boston Public Library
700 Boylston Street, Boston, MA 02116

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 Tuesday, October 18, 2016 at 8:30 a.m.

Present at the meeting were: Committee Chair William Stoneman, Committee Co-Chair Mary Pfeifer Lentz, and Committee Members: Brian Clancy, Stanley Cushing, Michael Ewald, Cheryl Nixon, Elizabeth “Lillie” Johnson, Vivian Spiro, Barbara “Muffy” Glauber, Rep. Byron Rushing, and BPL President David Leonard. Also in attendance were: BPL Chief of Collections Strategy Laura Irscher, Keeper of Special Collections Beth Prindle, Boston Public Library staff and members of the public.

Special Collections Committee Chair William Stoneman presided, and called the meeting to order at 8:40 a.m. Mr. Stoneman called for a review of the Meeting Minutes of Thursday, May 19, 2016. Mr. Clancy offered edits to the minutes and, upon a motion duly made and seconded, the Minutes of the May 19, 2016 Meeting were approved.

Mr. Stoneman reported that Susan Abbott resigned her membership in the Committee.

He introduced Mary Bender, Records Management Assistant at the Boston Public Library, who was taking minutes at the Committee’s meeting.

Mr. Stoneman provided an update on the recent opening of *Beyond Words: Illuminated Manuscripts in Boston Collections*, which includes 36 medieval and early Renaissance manuscripts and printed books on loan from the Boston Public Library. He said he was pleased to hear from a number of people who said they had no idea the Library had this kind of material. As he works on the launching of Beyondwords2016.org, he is impressed by the exceptional quality of digital material available from the Boston Public Library and offered thanks to Vivian Spiro and the Associates of the Boston Public Library for making the images universally available.

Laura Irscher, Chief of Collections Strategy, presented several loan requests for items whose value is appraised at more than \$50,000.

The first was for a loan of a Benjamin Franklin portrait for *The Pursuit of Pleasure: Casanova’s Europe*. Ms. Irscher explained that because the painting has recently been exhibited at the

Library, it was recently restored, reframed and researched, so staff work to get the loan ready is minimal.

Committee members asked questions about the Library's credit, the value of the piece, its size and condition, and costs prior to the vote. Ms. Prindle said the Library always reserves the right to withdraw an item if it feels the conditions of the loan are not being met.

Mr. Stoneman thanked the Committee for their thoughtful and insightful questions.

Upon motion made and duly seconded, the Committee

VOTED: that, pursuant to the terms of the Exhibition Loan Policy, the Boston Public Library Trustees Special Collections Committee recommends that the Trustees of the Public Library of the City of Boston approve the Loan of one (1) object to the Kimbell Art Museum, Fort Worth, TX, Fine Arts Museum of San Francisco; and Museum of Fine Arts, Boston for period August 27, 2017 to October 8, 2018, for purposes of *The Pursuit of Pleasure: Casanova's Europe*.

Ronald Grim, Curator of the Norman B. Leventhal Map Center at the Boston Public Library, presented a request to loan to the Massachusetts Historical Society *John Groves Hales' Map of Boston*, published in 1814. Mr. Grim described it as the first large scale map of Boston to show the outline of buildings and indicate their construction material. Committee members asked questions about framing, humidity, and lighting prior to the vote. The Map Center's Acquisitions Committee had recommended the loan.

Upon motion made and duly seconded, the Committee

VOTED: that, pursuant to the terms of the Exhibition Loan Policy, the Boston Public Library Trustees Special Collections Committee recommends that the Trustees of the Public Library of the City of Boston approve the Loan of one (1) object to the Massachusetts Historical Society, 1154 Boylston Street, Boston, Massachusetts 02215 for period May 10, 2018 to September 14, 2018 for purposes of *Entrepreneurship and Classical Design in Boston's South End: The Furniture of Isaac Vose & Thomas Seymour, 1815-1825*.

In the next item on the agenda, Beth Prindle, Head of Special Collections for the Library, spoke about the *Shakespeare Unauthorized* exhibition which had opened to the public four days earlier.

Ms. Prindle reported that 2,700 visitors had toured the exhibition in the first three days. The exhibition had also garnered quite a bit of media attention. The hope is to keep the wave of enthusiasm going with planned student tours, as well as performances, lectures, book discussions and movie showings at branches across the city in an entire season of programming. Ms. Prindle spoke of how exciting it is to see people coming for an exhibition featuring all Boston Public Library materials. She pointed out that all materials have undergone a high level of study, digitization, appraisal and conservation before being exhibited.

Ms. Spiro spoke of a dinner the Associates of the Boston Public Library was hosting which would not only help make the Library's deep collections known to attendees but had raised enough funds for two more positions for the Library for one year. She said the Associates had been successful in helping the Library bring in capable, well trained staff like Jay Moschella who came in as a Rare Books cataloger and is now Curator of Rare Books.

President Leonard thanked all who had contributed to the All the City's a Stage programming efforts of which *Shakespeare Unauthorized* is the signature. The citywide programming is made possible by staff and support from The Associates of the Boston Public Library, the Boston Public Library Foundation and the Boston Foundation.

Ms. Prindle next provided an update on Gallery J, the new exhibition space in the Johnson building. Casework is being delivered and installed, she said. There is no timetable for when it will open as work continues in order for exacting environmental, humidity, lighting and security conditions to be met. Some of the Library's finest examples of Woodcuts, Engravings and Lithography will be included in the first display, thanks to generous funding from Brian and Susan Clancy. In response to a Committee member's question, Ms. Prindle described the space as 80 linear feet of tall, wall mounted cases near the main atrium of the Johnson building. The library is currently working on plans and a timetable for future shows in the space.

The next item on the agenda involved Ms. Prindle updating the Committee on the Chavannes Mural Restoration. The Philosophy panel has been returned to its home in the McKim building she said. A complicated conservation process was involved for the delicate and sizeable piece, she said.

The project was unprecedented work in a very good way said President Leonard who hopes to find ways to share the story so that others may learn and duplicate the good work done with one of the Boston Public Library's permanent treasures.

Committee members offered suggestions for celebrating Chavannes now that it is restored and ready to be enjoyed.

Ms. Connie Chin, President of the Norman B. Leventhal Map Center at the Boston Public Library, said its show *Shakespeare's Here and Everywhere* had drawn 17,700 visitors since its opening in early September. She offered Committee members a tour after the meeting.

Ms. Chin said she had recently seen the Map Center's exhibition, *We Are One: Mapping America's Road from Revolution to Independence*, at Colonial Williamsburg where it is getting much attention.

In New Business, Ms. Irmischer reported that the Library has recently begun a search for a new position, Preservation Manager.

Ms. Spiro offered Committee members a chance to attend a private tour of *Beyond Words* at Boston College's McMullen Museum.

Mr. Clancy spoke of the Committee's role in relation to the Boston Public Library's Board of Trustees, and offered examples including: Creative catalyst, gadfly and highlighter of difficult truths like concerns about staffing and risk management.

Chairman Stoneman said he thinks with the recent resignation, is it time for the Committee to look for new members to be appointed, and bring in new skills or personalities.

Ms. Spiro queried what it costs to mount a major exhibition like *Shakespeare Unauthorized*. Ms. Prindle estimated that when one includes design and fabrication, a curator, conservation, digitization and printed programs, it could be \$500,000 over two years. That figure does not include a catalog as the Library as never seen a return on investment for a printed catalog.

Mr. Stoneman said the Committee might mull what is the function of exhibitions in the larger mission of the Library.

President Leonard echoed those sentiments saying the Library is working to complete inventory of its prints, conducting a high level assessment of its Special Collections, and planning for fixes for environmental issues in Rare Books and Manuscripts, as the Map Center conducts its 10-year review. With so many broader efforts underway, he applauds the Committee for its enthusiasm and its asking the right questions but said they should be tackled in appropriate order.

The Committee set its next meeting for Thursday, Feb. 9, 2017 at 8:30 a.m.

With no further New Business, the Meeting was adjourned at 9:47 a.m. Members were offered the chance to tour the Shakespeare exhibitions or the Rare Books Department.

Respectfully Submitted,

Mary Bender
Records Management Assistant

Trustees of the Public Library of the City of Boston
Robert E. Gallery, Chair, Evelyn Arana-Ortiz, Vice Chair,
Zamawa Arenas, Ben Bradlee, Jr., Cheryl Cronin, Carol Fulp,
John Hailer, Paul A. La Camera, Byron Rushing

President, David Leonard
Minute taker, Mary Bender

For information check www.bpl.org

Mary Bender, October 18, 2016