

BOSTON PUBLIC LIBRARY SPECIAL COLLECTIONS COMMITTEE MEETING

**Tuesday, February 11, 2014, at 8:30 a.m.
Central Library, Copley Square
McKim Building, Commonwealth Salon
700 Boylston Street, Boston, MA**

Draft Minutes

A meeting of the Boston Public Library Special Collections Committee was held at the Boston Public Library, Commonwealth Salon, 700 Boylston Street, Boston, MA on Tuesday, February 11, 2014 at 8:30 a.m.

Present at the meeting were: Former Committee Chairman Brian Clancy, Committee Members: BPL Trustee Byron Rushing, Mr. Stanley Cushing, Ms. Elizabeth “Lillie” Johnson, Mr. Vincent Petronella, BPL President Amy Ryan, and Mr. William Stoneman.

Also in attendance were BPL Staff: Ms. Susan Glover, Ms. Laura Irmischer, Chris Letizia, and Cheryl A. Delaney.

New Special Collections Committee Chairman Mr. William Stoneman presided.

Former Committee Chairman Brian Clancy addressed the Committee to welcome the newly appointed Chairman of the Committee, Mr. William Stoneman. Mr. Clancy acknowledged Amy Ryan’s leadership and Ms. Ryan’s and Susan Glover’s leadership in recruiting Committee membership. He said it has been his honor and privilege to chair the Committee for five years. Mr. Clancy presented Mr. William Stoneman with a *Read Your Way To Fenway* official baseball and turned over the meeting to Mr. Stoneman. Mr. Stoneman thanked Mr. Clancy for his extraordinary five years of service to the Committee.

Ms. Ryan announced that her administrative assistant, Nancy Grilk has retired and that there is a selection committee working on filling her position. In Ms. Grilk’s absence, Cheryl Delaney will be taking the minutes of the meeting.

Mr. Stoneman asked for approval of the Minutes for the Boston Public Library Special Collections Committee (“Committee”) Meeting held on October 15, 2013. Discussion on revisions to the minutes followed. On a motion made and duly seconded, the Minutes of the Boston Public Library Special Collections Committee Meeting held on October 15, 2013 at 8:30 a.m. were approved.

Ms. Ryan drew the Committee’s attention to the Collection Development Policy, p. 9 that states the criteria for acquisition/deaccession of the collections. She pointed out that the Allan Rohan Crite piece, valued at \$13,000 dollars, fits into the third category of objects of collections valued between \$10,000 and \$49,000.

Mr. Stoneman then asked Ms. Glover to address the Committee. Ms. Glover introduced Chris Letizia, Acting Chief Book Conservator, who showed the Committee a watercolor by Allan Rohan Crite, an African American artist from Boston. The watercolor is being proposed for acquisition. The BPL has a large collection of Crite's works. This piece is offered by Crite's widow through Childs Gallery. The *Chapel of the Epiphany, St. John Evangelist Church*, a signed watercolor dated 1940, was initially offered to the BPL for a price of \$20,000.00 which seemed high. Childs Gallery reduced the price to \$13,000, a reduction of \$7,000. This acquisition is recommended as an important early work of Crite's, coming directly from his widow, and builds on the existing strength of Boston Artists, a proposed Collection of Distinction. While there is much of Crite's work in the collection, there is no other highly finished watercolor by him. A smaller linoleum cut, for \$900.00, is being added to the collection. It falls into the first category, being valued at less than \$1,000, and so will not come before the Committee.

Discussion on Crite and the remainder of his collection followed. Ms. Glover confirmed that there was a memorial exhibition of Crite's work in the Wiggin Gallery held immediately after his death.

Mr. Clancy asked that the record reflect that the Committee went through the formal accession score card.

On a motion made and duly seconded, that the Boston Public Library Special Collections Committee approves the purchase of Allan Rohan Crite. *Chapel of the Epiphany, St. John Evangelist Church, Bowdoin Street, Boston MA.*

Ms. Glover then presented to the Committee, a second proposed acquisition, a set of eight original watercolors and seven pen and ink drawings executed to illustrate an abridged children's edition of Cervantes' *Don Quixote* in 1887. The work was created by Jules David, a highly regarded fashion illustrator, who continued painting after his retirement from fashion. These iconic images for a children's edition of *Don Quixote* proved so popular that they were used in more than 40 different editions. This collection is an addition to the Ticknor Collection of Spanish and Portuguese Literature, a Collection of Distinction, and is offered by Michael Weintraub, a New York City antiquarian book dealer for \$15,000. Committee Chairman Stoneman stated that because an entire generation associates *Don Quixote* with these illustrations, they are important. Additionally, the potential for exhibition is really wonderful.

Mr. Clancy asked about the comps and how were they established. Ms. Glover stated the price compared favorably with the last acquisition from the Garnier Frères archive. A brief discussion of the difficulties of the current framework followed. Ms. Ryan stated she would like to propose editing the forms and presenting them in draft form to the Committee at the next meeting. The Committee agreed that this would be a good idea. Chairman Stoneman asked that there be consistent language in the two documents. Committeewoman Lillie Johnson stated that the MFA's process for establishing guidelines for new acquisitions has been an established document for a long time, but is also tweaked often and never considered completed. It is a fluid document.

Mr. Clancy mentioned that the last two criteria were given an NA for the *Don Quixote* purchase. Spanish culture is a huge part of Boston, and it continues to develop and grow. Through his

collecting, Ticknor showed enormous respect for the Hispanic culture. This is an opportunity to celebrate the collection and do outreach. Ms. Ryan suggested that the criteria be amended to add this suggestion. Ms. Glover thanked Mr. Clancy for his suggestion and agreed that she would amend the criteria to reflect this sentiment.

On a motion made and duly seconded, that the Boston Public Library Special Collections Committee approves the purchase of the 8 watercolors and 7 pen and ink drawings by Jules David for an edition of *Don Quixote*.

Chairman Stoneman asked Ms. Glover to report on the status of Ms. Med. 203. Ms. Glover reminded the Committee of the previous discussion about Ms. Med. 203, an Italian mariegola created in Bologna in 1392 and its difficult provenance. It appeared from the provenance work performed by Lisa Fagin-Davis, that the manuscript disappeared from the Archivio di Stato Venezia in about 1949 under unknown circumstances. The BPL was proactive and wrote to the Archivio di Stato Venezia to determine if it had left the collection by legal means. The Archivio di Stato Venezia responded that the manuscript was, indeed, part of its collection and that it had been stolen in 1949. The theft was subsequently reported to INTERPOL.

The description sent to the BPL no longer describes the manuscript in our possession. The opening page and several bifolia have been removed; the original binding was removed and the leaves rebound out of order. A lengthy discussion followed about the manuscript, its provenance, and the process for returning it. Ms. Johnson asked if the Archivio di Stato Venezia had asked that the manuscript be returned. They had not. They are awaiting our response. The Committee suggested that Ms. Glover write to Archivio to determine next steps. Additionally, a letter will be sent to the Toledo Museum of Art to alert them of this situation since they have four leaves from this mariegola. The manuscript will be sent to the NEDCC to be digitized to serve as a record of an object that was once in our collection in the event the Archivio asks that it be returned, and as protection since the manuscript is physically much different than when it was taken from Italy. Ms. Glover will report on this issue at the next Committee meeting.

Chairman Stoneman invited Laura Irscher to report on the restricted trust funds. Ms. Irscher reported on the total FY14 materials budget of \$4.4 million. The trust funds that are restricted to the purchase of Special Collections materials had an average distribution of \$589,000 over the last four years with a principal of \$2.4 million. A discussion of some specific trust funds, histories, and current practices ensued. A discussion of fundraising opportunities regarding the Collections of Distinction also followed. Many of the Collections of Distinction are orphans as far as funding is concerned but present us with some interesting funding opportunities.

Chairman Stoneman asked Ms. Glover and Irscher to report on the next group of candidates for Collections of Distinction status. Ms. Irscher reviewed the criteria for the Collections of Distinction and gave brief descriptions of the following proposed candidates:

- Boston Pictorial Archive: Print Department
- Allan A. Brown Collection: Rare Books/The Arts
- Massachusetts Newspapers: Microtext/Rare Books

Ms. Glover briefly described the following proposed candidates:

- Mellon Chamberlain Collection of Autographs: Rare Books
- The Benton Collection of Books of Common Prayer: Rare Books
- Trent Collection of Defoe and Defoeana: Rare Books

- Boston Artists Collection: Rare Books

After a lengthy discussion about each of the proposed candidates, Mr. Clancy suggested the Committee be given more time for discussion at the next meeting before voting to approve them. Chairman Stoneman also suggested that it would be helpful to know what other candidates will be proposed in the future to assess how all the proposed Collections of Distinction compare, to be certain that all meet the criteria. Mses. Glover and Irscher will put together the list of those likely candidates and those collections that keep being mentioned but may not rise to that level for the Committee to discuss.

As there was no other business, Chairman Stoneman asked for a motion to adjourn.

Respectfully submitted,

Cheryl Delaney