

BOSTON PUBLIC LIBRARY SPECIAL COLLECTIONS COMMITTEE MEETING

**Tuesday, May 20, 2014, at 8:30 a.m.
Central Library, Copley Square
McKim Building, Commonwealth Salon
700 Boylston Street, Boston, MA**

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, May 20, 2014 at 8:30 a.m.

Present at the meeting were: Committee Chairman William Stoneman, Committee Members: Ms. Susan Abbott, Mr. Brian Clancy, Mr. Michael Ewald, Ms. Elizabeth “Lillie” Johnson, Mr. Vincent Petronella, BPL Trustee Byron Rushing, and BPL President Amy Ryan. BPL staff in attendance: Ms. Susan Glover, Ms. Laura Irmischer, Mr. Henry Scannell, Mr. Chris Letizia, and Ms. Deborah Kirrane.

Special Collections Committee Chairman Mr. William Stoneman presided. The meeting was called to order at 8:35 a.m.

Committee Chairman William Stoneman addressed the Committee and welcomed the new Clerk of the Board, Deborah Kirrane. Mr. Stoneman acknowledged the hard work of predecessor chairman Brian Clancy and clerk, Nancy Grilk, and indicated that he and Ms. Kirrane had big shoes to fill in their roles going forward.

Mr. Stoneman asked for approval of the Minutes for the Boston Public Library Special Collections Committee (“Committee”) Meeting held on February 11, 2014. 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 February 11, 2014 at 8:30 a.m. were approved.

Ms. Ryan drew the Committee’s attention to Agenda item III, Collections of Distinction, listing three topics as suggested by the Committee at the last meeting: (A) Review of Criteria; (B) Review of Future Collections of Distinction Candidates to be Evaluated; and (C) Review of Collections of Distinction Candidates – Phase 2 Proposed Collections. Ms. Ryan explained the difference between the universe of Collections of Distinction and the Phase 2 collection candidates. The “universe” of collections includes all current Collections of Distinction plus those the Committee may consider in the future. The Phase 2 candidates are those, selected from the universe, to be reviewed and proposed to the Trustees for identification as Collections of Distinction.

Ms. Ryan reminded the Committee that Collections of Distinction receive priority of access to allocation of resources, preservation, acquisition, and staff development. She stressed the importance of having the appropriate number of collection candidates to maximize these efforts.

Considering the entire list of 58 candidates currently is too many, but something to be considered over the course of the next ten years. Mr. Stoneman suggested an annual or every other year review, but that the Committee is to be aware of the collections in the “universe.” The Committee and the BPL should not designate additional Collections of Distinction if collections already in existence are not being supported and used.

“Priority of access’ was defined by Ms. Ryan as cataloging, accessibility, and whether a collection lends itself to exhibition and digitization. Staff development and the assignment of curators go along with each collection selection.

Mr. Stoneman stated that the way people are coming to collections is changing. Collections of Distinction are to be digitized so that people will find them in the same way they are now used to finding things. Ms. Ryan described a recent meeting regarding the Johnson renovation. Thoughts were focused around conveying to patrons and visitors that the Library has more than what is initially seen. Ms. Imscher added that the Library needs to find ways to connect people with the items on the shelves that one may not be aware of; something to indicate we have Collections of Distinction related to various topics of interest. Ms. Ryan explained that the emphasis would be on interactivity; that members of the public could contribute content (i.e. photographs, manuscripts) to some of our resources – and that Committee suggestions were welcome!

Mr. Petronella asked if there was an avenue through which donations may be made. Ms. Glover expressed that the BPL frequently receives calls about donations, not necessarily monetary, but donations of materials and that an established path to donation currently exists.

Mr. Stoneman saw the Johnson renovations as an opportunity to merchandise or provide retail opportunities around the Collections of Distinction. He suggested postcards and calendars as items that could take advantage of the material in the collections. Ms. Glover indicated that the Print department alone receives multiple requests for images every month.

Mr. Clancy asked the group to think back to the Committee charge. He sees a number of the collections as providing opportunities to reach communities that the BPL may not reach as well currently. He mentioned Greek, Russian, Haitian, Islam, and History of Women, as examples. The opportunity to reach out to communities should be an important driver. In discussing communities, Ms. Ryan highlighted Haitian Heritage Month BPL programming: exhibitions, and a panel on which Rep. Rushing is participating, and she recognized Mr. Clancy’s point as compelling.

From the universe of 58 collections, Mr. Stoneman expressed concern that a large number of collections may “water down” existing collections. He asked if there was a way to combine collections so there may not be as many. He suggested labeling community collections as “Boston Constituent Communities” as opposed to individual communities and asked, when does the number of collections cease to be distinctive? Ms. Ryan is mindful of the balance between number and depth of collections.

The meeting then addressed Attachment 3: Phase 2 Proposed Collections, collections presented at the last meeting, and to be reviewed and recommended the Trustees.

Ms. Ryan introduced Mr. Henry Scannell, Curator of Microtext and Newspapers to present on the proposed Massachusetts Newspaper Collection. Mr. Scannell stated that Boston was the first city in the country to have newspapers, beginning in 1704 with *The Boston Newsletter*. The BPL has always had newspapers, from many different sources, in its collection. He described the newspaper collection as the source for the history of the common man, covering every demographic of the City of Boston, its communities and ethnic groups.

Ms. Imscher next described the Allen A. Brown Music Collection. This collection started with an initial 7,000 items focused on European classical music. The collection now contains 16,000 volumes plus an endowment. The special thing about this collection is Brown's intent to make it more accessible to the common person. He wanted his collection to live in a public library and that is the spirit of his gift and subsequent additions to the collection. Ms. Imscher indicated that the collection contains a wide variety of published volumes and unique items.

Mr. Clancy indicated that while the Brown collection has integrity, history and intent, it does not have some of the true treasures of the music department, such as Mozart and Schubert, raising the question of how the Brown collection would fit in with other music collections. It has historic persistency but some of the core parts of the music collection are here but do not benefit from attributes that Collections of Distinction - earlier in line for digitization, cataloging, exhibition, etc. - how does this collection dovetail or fit in? Ms. Ryan responded that even if a collection is not a Collection of Distinction, it is still valued and appropriately highlighted. Collections of Distinction just receive a higher priority.

Rep. Rushing pointed out that the Brown Collection came to us with approximately 7,000 pieces and that, through Mr. Brown's generous donation, we have been able to increase the collection to approximately 40,000 pieces. The additional pieces were not decided upon by Mr. Brown. Ms. Imscher indicated that the Brown Collection was the primary music collection proposed for Collection of Distinction designation.

Mr. Petronella asked how much demand had been for the music from the Brown Collection, if chamber groups or orchestra had requested the material, and does interest motivate the collection to become a Collection of Distinction? Pieces of the Brown Collection are frequently asked for; however, because the Brown Collection is mostly cataloged, people are aware of the contents of this collection as opposed to other collections that are not cataloged.

Rep. Rushing asked if the BPL should be cataloging this material and offering it up as a distinctive musical collection, recognizing the staff and financial resources that would be required to do this.

Ms. Ryan drew a parallel between the music collection and Children's Literature. Like the Music Collection, the Children's Literature collection is actually three separate collections. Because of its size, it does not feel right to name a Collection of Distinction "Children's Literature," and is the reason why it is not on the list for the next phase.

Mr. Stoneman indicated that librarians are keenly aware of what's being asked for and what is in use, and that the BPL should not be putting all its resources into what's in demand or popular now as subjects and interests wax and wane. Part of the challenge is to be in position to meet demand when it happens, noting that public interest can change rapidly.

Ms. Glover then presented the next proposed collection: The Benton Collection of Editions of the Book of Common Prayer. As opposed to the Brown Music collection, the Benton Collection is a very focused collection. Josiah Benton was a founding trustee of the BPL and a great benefactor. For years the Collection of the Book of Common Prayer was supported by the Benton Fund, a large fund which has since been refocused into other areas. The BPL recently purchased two new books, not in this collection, a Greek book of common prayer and an early 1600 book, with monies from the Benton fund. Ms. Glover described the significance of the historic bindings present on many of the prayer books. The bindings and the history of print dovetail nicely into this collection.

Mr. Petronella asked if there are demands from church groups or those interested in parish research, for this collection. Mr. Stoneman remarked that until a church decides to revise its prayer book and uses the collection for its text, the collection now appears to be used by binding historians primarily, and keeping up with the other elements of the collection – not just the subject matter – may be the challenge. Rep. Rushing expressed interest in seeing who used accessed this collection in the 1960s, to which Ms. Glover responded that the BPL does retain call slips for every book ever requested. Ms. Ryan stressed that this information is private.

Ms. Johnson inquired about the Old South Church prayer book, and discussion then turned to security concerns, with Ms. Ryan indicated that the BPL consulted with then Police Commissioner Davis as well as reviewing security at the MFA, and has improved its own security. Ms. Johnson remarked that publicity often drives popularity.

Rep. Rushing described the Book of Common Prayer collection as a clear and distinct collection. It is easy for one to connect with this collection, how it is used, and how it overlaps with other collections. This is different than the Brown Music Collection.

Ms. Glover next discussed the Boston Artists Collection, a premier collection of the Print department developed over the last number of years by courting the local artist community and taking advantage of the fact that the MFA was, at the time, not purchasing works of local artists. The Boston arts community is generous and there is a prestige to being in the BPL. Many will often donate something or offer large discounts when purchasing. In addition to being the most exhibited collection, it is used regularly by students and classes. The collection is very Boston-focused. The artists either live, work, were educated, or have some tie to Boston. It differs from the next proposed collection: Boston Pictorial Archive in that Boston Artists Collection contains contemporary works as opposed to the historic collection of historic images, prints, drawings, and watercolors of the Boston Pictorial Archive.

The next proposed Collection of Distinction, the Boston Pictorial Archive, is a strong collection of works from 1860-1930. It is a collection pulled together from various departments within the BPL. The 6,000 images on paper represent a visual history of the City of Boston. An example

item includes the first bird's eye view of Boston from a hot air balloon. It is a collection in high demand from scholars writing books, and the public wanting images. This whole archive has been digitized and may explain why it is in such high demand. The Boston Pictorial Archive has no dedicated funding, but the Print Department has robust trust funds dedicated to print specifically, some with specific areas of focus (i.e., Boston artists, pre-1850, etc.).

Mr. Stoneman congratulated and thanked Mses. Imscher, Glover, and the curators for their work in preparing the Collections of Distinction proposal materials. The consistent format allows for appropriate and meaningful review.

The next collection, the Chamberlain Collection of Autographs, was presented by Ms. Glover. Mr. Chamberlain was a librarian at the BPL who donated his collection of autographs to the BPL. The Chamberlain Collection is more than a collection of autographs. It started out with a narrow focus and became broad, rich, and deep as a collection and contains documents, letters, manuscripts, and plays. The collection receives tremendous use because it is such a wide collection addressing European and United States history. Items are not purchased for the collection. Complementary items, when purchased, are not made part of this collection.

Ms. Ryan explained that the titles of the proposed collections are often modified by editors and members of the Communications Department. Mr. Clancy indicated that a great job had been done and that the editors and BPL staff had a "green light" to adjust titles as necessary.

The next collection, the William P. Trent Collection of Defoe and Defoeana was presented by Ms. Glover. The exhibit was acquired in 1929 for \$29,000 and includes works in various editions, together with Defoe's political pamphlet work. Due in part to Cheryl Nixon's passion, this collection is highly used, especially by U.Mass Boston students, and others as well. The Indiana University and the British Museum have similar collections. Ms. Glover indicated that the Trustees who purchased this collection, and the Shakespeare collection just a few years prior, were eager to purchase this as a complement to the Shakespeare collection.

After having presented all seven of the Phase 2 proposed Collections of Distinction, Mr. Stoneman asked if the Committee was ready to vote, and read the Vote to the Committee. He explained that if selected, the proposed collections would join the existing 18 collections.

The Committee discussed whether the Allen A. Brown Music Collection should be included as a Collection of Distinction. Rep. Rushing suggested that the Committee spend more time in establishing what is distinct in the music collection as a large number of items were added to this collection, after it was named. Ms. Ryan suggested that the Brown Music Collection be removed from the proposed Collections of Distinction list and readdressed for further discussion in the fall at the next meeting. Mr. Stoneman pointed out that the curator of the Brown Music Collection should not feel that this decision is a defeat or a failure. The actions taken are the Committee doing its job, and the reason the Committee was able to be so engaged, was because the curator(s) have done such an amazing job in preparing and presenting the Brown Music Collection as a Phase 2 proposed collection.

Mr. Ewald expressed concern regarding the narrowness of the Benton Book of Common Prayer Collection and whether the subject matter of this Collection was too focused. He asked if there

was a way to combine this collection with another collection, perhaps the existing bookbinding collection. Rep. Rushing pointed out that the Book of Common Prayer is probably the third most quoted group of English literature and represents a large sweep of British history. Mr. Petronella indicated that it made sense to include the Book of Common Prayer Collection in the vote as the focus of the collection was so powerful and the richness of the collection significant.

Mr. Stoneman then advised that Committee that the vote would include six of the seven proposed collections, tabling the Brown Music Collection for discussion at the next meeting. On motion made and duly seconded, the six of the seven proposed Phase 2 Collections be identified as BPL Collections of Distinction.

Attachment 4 – Draft Acquisition Template for Objects or Collections Valued at \$10,000 or Above – was next addressed. Ms. Irmscher described the framework of the template document used to evaluation a collection or an acquisition. Purchase decisions under \$10,000 are made by BPL staff. Those over \$10,000 are first presented to the Special Collections Committee, and those over \$50,000 are brought to the Board of Trustees. The template utilizes the same format and language as the Collections of Distinction proposals and was created based upon similar documents used by the New York Public Library and the Free Library of Philadelphia. The template is a more direct way to present information and, from a curatorial standpoint, it is easier to use than prior versions.

Ms. Abbott suggested that donor imposed restrictions should be placed as a separate bullet within the document and Mr. Clancy recommended a bullet indicating the appropriateness for exhibition and significance for community outreach in an effort to address all Boston communities.

Ms. Glover next described the potential acquisition of Hamlet set designs, created in 1926 by Czech avant garde artist Vlastislav Hofman for the National Theater of Prague. The set designs relate to the Shakespeare Collection of Distinction and have great exhibition potential as part of the planned 2016 Shakespeare exhibit. The set designs are in good condition and are being offered to the BPL by Michael Weintraub for \$25,000. The materials could be digitized easily and made available to public within one year. While there is a need to investigate for any potential copyright issues, the BPL feels that the set designs can appropriately be digitized through a Creative Commons License.

The next potential acquisition, 88 drawings and cartoons of William Steig, was next presented by Ms. Glover. She described William Steig as a great cartoonist for *The New Yorker*, who lived the last portion of his life in Boston. His widow, Jeanne Steig, is also an artist and has placed he husband's remaining 10,000 drawings with various institutions. This collection of 88 drawings would be added to the existing BPL Steig collection and includes Steig's broad range of work including cartoons, doodles, blotch paintings, and *New Yorker* covers. Mr. Steig is an important artist and his works exhibit easily.

Mr. Stoneman asked about the possibility of Steig's drawings being used for postcard or retail material for the BPL if allowed. Ms. Glover responded that Jeanne Steig owns all of the physical work and the Steig children hold the copyrights. Currently there is no program to produce postcards or things of that nature.

Mr. Stoneman called for motions to purchase the Vlastislav Hofman collection and accept the William Steig collection gift. The motions were approved unanimously.

The meeting schedule was next discussed. As Brenda Lawson has regular staff meetings on Tuesday mornings, the meetings will be moved to another day of the week.

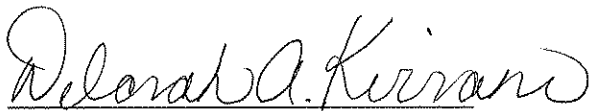
Ms. Ryan will rework the Committee meeting schedule and will send the new schedule, together with information regarding the Bromsen Lecture series, to the Committee members via email.

Ms. Ryan announced the re-establishment of the Maury Bromsen Lecture in Humanistic Bibliography. Mr. Norman Fiering had brought to the attention of the BPL the presence of an existing endowment for a lecture series. The amount of money, presently \$74,000 to spend, is to be used to invite scholars to speak on humanistic rather than descriptive nature of various historical subjects related to print material. Mr. Fiering has assembled a committee of five members. Ms. Ryan asked the Special Collections Committee for ideas about topics and speakers. The lecture is intended to occur annually or every other year. The speaker would be a big draw and a very high profile event for the BPL that would draw civic and national attention. All of the prior lectures have been digitized. The last lecture occurred in 2001. The Bromsen Lecture Committee will meet in the next month and develop ideas, using the Drunker Lecture design as a model.

Ms. Glover briefly described the New England Regional Fellowship Consortium. From 21 applications, four Fellowes were selected, one from each of University of Massachusetts, University of Virginia, University of Nevada, and Harvard, and Ms. Glover described the dissertation topics of each fellow. Mr. Stoneman commented that the strength of the pool of Fellowes applicants is a strong indication of and tribute to the Collections of Distinction.

With no new business before the Committee, the meeting was adjourned at 10:12 a.m.

Respectfully submitted,



Deborah A. Kirrane, Clerk of the Board