

# **BOSTON PUBLIC LIBRARY SPECIAL COLLECTIONS COMMITTEE MEETING**

**Thursday, September 25, 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 Thursday, September 25, 2014 at 8:30 a.m.

Present at the meeting were: Committee Chairman William Stoneman, and Committee Members: Mr. Stanley Cushing, Ms. Cheryl Nixon, Ms. Elizabeth “Lillie” Johnson, Mr. Vincent Petronella, and Ms. Vivian Spiro. Also in attendance were Ronald Grim, Curator of Maps at the Norman B. Leventhal Map Center and BPL staff: Ms. Laura Irmsher, Ms. Susan Glover, Ms. Karen Shafts, and Ms. Deborah Kirrane.

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

Chairman Stoneman pointed out to the Committee the lack of a quorum attending. Accordingly, the Committee could address the entire agenda but would not be able to vote on items and, instead, could only “endorse” those agenda items requiring a vote.

The first agenda item, Review and Approval of the Minutes of the May 20, 2014 meeting, was introduced. A motion to endorse approval of the minutes was duly made, seconded, and the Committee unanimously endorsed approval of the minutes.

The second agenda item: Exhibition and Loan Policy and Procedure was addressed. Ms. Irmsher explained that the Boston Public Library does not currently have a loan policy and thus the policy proposed does not replace anything currently in existence. The proposed policy would be given to institutions requesting a loan from the BPL and thoughts from the Committee regarding the policy and the procedure documents were encouraged.

Ms. Glover indicated that the BPL (Rare Books and Print Departments) receives ten to 15 requests for loans a year, and that items are requested for both large and small shows, as well as exhibits that travel throughout the globe. She explained that there are currently six to eight requests pending, awaiting approval of the loan policy. Ms. Glover indicated that the BPL does not employ a registrar and while BPL staff spend significant time processing loan requests, it is an important job. It is how BPL collections are seen by many and the major collections deserve the limelight.

Mr. Grim indicated that the Norman B. Leventhal Map Center receives a small number of loan requests, but the majority of their work consists of loans they initiate themselves. Much of the Map Center’s loans are to the Osher Library in Portland, Maine, as the facility and program are

familiar to the Map Center. Mr. Grim explained that as the Map Center borrows items from other institutions for its next exhibition, the Map Center is seeing loan policies from those institutions, and recognizes the evolution of such policies.

Ms. Glover stressed that while the BPL did not have a loan policy, it has been following established procedures that are outlined in the documents before the Committee. Ms. Irmsher pointed out that the BPL was seeking recommendations from the Committee and the Board of Trustees as this process was new.

Ms. Glover spoke to lack of last minute cancelations on behalf of borrowers. Because BPL staff spend a great deal of time speaking with borrowers at the outset, last minute cancellations are often avoided. It was confirmed that all costs associated with a loan are paid for by the borrowing institution (e.g., conservation, matting, crating, packing, shipping, insurance, courier services). The BPL's only expense is the staff time.

Mr. Stoneman shared for the Committee his discussion with BPL President, Amy Ryan, where it was suggested that because the BPL is a public institution, it has an obligation to look after its collections and it is why the BPL goes through the evaluation and conservation process. The obligation is especially important to Boston and the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, and that given the amount of staff time involved in processing loan requests, it may make sense to charge a loan fee to non-Massachusetts borrowers. He stated that many institutions have such fees and Ms. Glover's research indicated that standard fees range from \$100 to \$200 per object, per venue.

Ms. Spiro encouraged members of the Committee to advocate for increased BPL staffing to handle the collections and loan requests. She compared the BPL with two conservators to Yale University who employs 20 conservators. Mr. Stoneman recognized the hard working BPL staff as responsible for building the BPL's collections and the staff's integral role in making the loans happen.

Ms. Glover expressed that it is through loans that the vast collection is seen. She further indicated that while loans do represent hard work, it is work that is enjoyed by the curatorial staff who consider it part of their ongoing education.

Ms. Johnson described loans for fee as a "slippery slope." Perhaps asking institutions for loan fees would cause the same institutions to ask the BPL for similar fees on items the BPL wished to borrow. She stressed the value of successful relationships with other institutions, and that requiring a loan fee may hurt those relationships. Mr. Stoneman described the loan fee as something that could only apply to out-of-state borrowers, and the BPL would have flexibility over such a fee.

Upon questioning from the Committee, Ms. Glover explained the BPL's criteria for lending and that often loans are not made to smaller venues as they often cannot meet the BPL's firm security or environmental requirements.

Mr. Stoneman called for a motion to endorse the proposed loan policy and procedures as acceptable.

Mr. Petronella acknowledged that the proposed policy and procedures attest to the kind of work being done by BPL staff. The documents show remarkable experience and eliminate doubt as to what is going on or what needs to be done to effectuate a loan. He offered his congratulations to those involved.

Ms. Nixon asked that the minutes reflect that there is ongoing evaluation of the loan fee. Mr. Stoneman further stated that the loan fee proposal would be brought back to the Committee for further discussion prior to presenting same to the Trustees. He described instituting a loan fee as a major change in policy that will have ramifications going forward, and asked that the proposed loan policy and procedures – absent the loan fee – be endorsed. Upon motion made and duly seconded, the Committee unanimously endorsed same.

The Committee addressed the next agenda item: Review and Approval of New Acquisitions. Ms. Irmsher pointed out the addition of “Community Outreach” as a field on the acquisition template used to evaluate acquisitions. The field was added based on Committee feedback and, based on the same feedback, “Donor Imposed Restrictions,” was made a unique field from “Potential Challenges.”

Ms. Glover introduced the Timothy Newell manuscript and oil painting to the Committee. The six-page manuscript of Newell describes the Siege of Boston (1775-76), and the accompanying portrait is the only known likeness of Newell in existence. The manuscript is not bound and would be easy to digitize. Both the manuscript and the painting were shown to the Committee. Mr. Stoneman called for a motion to endorse the acquisition which was duly seconded and the Committee unanimously endorsed the Newell acquisition.

**ENDORSED: “that, the Boston Public Library Trustees Special Collection Committee approves the purchase of Timothy Newell’s manuscript journal of the Siege of Boston 1775-76. With an oil portrait of Newell by Henry Sargent, ca. 1800.**

Ms. Shafts presented the Mary Cassatt’s *George Moore* acquisition. While she described the acquisition to the Committee, Ms. Glover showed the Committee the first and second states up for purchase. Ms. Shafts pointed out the relation of the proposed acquisition to the proposed American Master Prints Collection of Distinction. The BPL print collection is a study collection, and to have a first and second state is an important teaching aspect and highly appropriate for a study collection.

Upon motion made and duly seconded, the Committee endorsed the purchase of the two states of Mary Cassatt’s *George Moore*.

**ENDORSED: “that, the Boston Public Library Trustees Special Collection Committee approves the purchase of two states of Mary Cassatt’s *George Moore* (ca. 1880).**

The next proposed acquisition, *Pissarro's Paysage sous bois, a l'Hermitage*, was similarly presented by Ms. Shafts. The material, the price, the condition, and the relationship to other material in the BPL collection were discussed.

Upon motion made and duly seconded, the Committee unanimously endorsed recommending to the Board of Trustees of the BPL the purchase of Camille Pissarro's *Paysage sous bois, a l'Hermitage*.

**ENDORSED: “that, the Boston Public Library Trustees Special Collection Committee recommends to the Board of Trustees of the Boston Public Library the purchase of Camille Pissarro's Paysage sous bois, à l'Hermitage (Pontoise)**

The next agenda item, acceptance of the Nancy Webb Bequest, was presented by Ms. Shafts. Ms. Webb's long relationship to the BPL, the value of her collection, and its relation to the Boston Artists Collection of Distinction were all discussed. Ms. Glover explained to the Committee that the bequest includes a financial gift providing for the upkeep of the collection. A motion was made and duly seconded, and the Committee unanimously endorsed acceptance of the Nancy Webb bequest. The Committee offered its thanks to the Webb family for their generosity.

**ENDORSED: “that, the Boston Public Library Trustees Special Collection Committee approves to receive The Nancy Webb Bequest.**

Ms. Irmsher next provided the Committee with an update on the Collections of Distinction, and described for the Committee those collections currently in the pipeline for consideration. She thanked the Committee for their work at the May 20, 2014 meeting in which six Collections of Distinction were approved and presented to the Trustees at their September meeting. She explained that there are currently 24 Collections of Distinction and an additional 24 candidates being considered. Ms. Irmsher confirmed that those items not selected for Collection of Distinction status are still amazing collections and are not being considered for deaccessioning.

Ms. Irmsher pointed out that the Brown Music Collection, a former Collection of Distinction candidate, would be re-evaluated pending the hiring of a music curator.

Ms. Glover discussed the lack of an update on the Mariegola Della Scuola Santa Maria Della Misericordia. Ms. Glover reported that there has been no response from the Archivio di Stato in Venice to the letter sent in April 2014. Additionally, Amanda Mall, Assistant Registrar at the Toledo Museum of Art, called in response to the BPL's April 2014 letter. The Toledo Museum of Art will also reach out to the Archivio di Stato.

Mr. Stoneman discussed the Bromsen Lecture Series Committee. He described the lecture series and the inaugural meeting of the Bromsen Committee in which a list of speakers was assembled.

Ms. Glover next introduced a Civil War artifact that the BPL recently acquired which included a photograph and journal of Private Charles Tarbox of the 35<sup>th</sup> Massachusetts Regiment Company G, who was killed in the Battle of Antietam. Private Tarbox was carrying his journal in his

breast pocket when the journal was pierced by the bullet that subsequently killed him. The Committee was pleased with being shown such an artifact.

There being no New Business before the Committee, the meeting adjourned at 10:13 a.m.