Conserving and Digitizing the Library’s Special Collections

Associates of the Boston Public Library

Annual Report 2018–2019

Conserving and Digitizing the Library’s Special Collections
Letter from the Chairman

DEAR FRIENDS,

Thank you so much for your support over the last year! Because of you, a wide range of rare books, handwritten manuscripts, beautiful prints, and historic photographs in the Boston Public Library’s Special Collections were conserved, cataloged, and made available to the public. The following report outlines some of the remarkable work that was accomplished, through your generosity, between July 1, 2018 and June 30, 2019.

I was especially thrilled by two new collaborations this year. First, a partnership between Boston’s Museum of Fine Arts, the Library, and the Associates resulted in a joint MFA-BPL exhibition of over two hundred prints and drawings by Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec—roughly half on loan from the Library’s Print Department. In support of this exceptional exhibition, Toulouse-Lautrec and the Stars of Paris, the Associates funded specialized conservation of a number of the original posters to be displayed; a public lecture on this preservation work; digitization of all 360 of the BPL’s Toulouse-Lautrec works of art; and a mini satellite exhibition in the BPL’s Johnson Lobby.

The Associates also partnered with New England Conservatory to launch our inaugural Pierce Performance Series, a spectacular concert that commemorated the 150th anniversary of the Peace Jubilee.

This year, the Associates continued our commitment to supporting key BPL positions working directly with the Special Collections, and provided Library staff with relevant professional development opportunities. In addition, we funded the outsourcing of a number of rare materials that required specialized and time-intensive work. This support also included paying for experts to work on-site to assess a very fragile collection of rolled posters, and for a dedicated team to inventory the BPL’s vast Photography Collection.

I am grateful to each of you for joining us in this endeavor to preserve the Library’s treasures. I sincerely hope that you will continue to support our efforts to ensure that these historic and beautiful items will meet the test of time, surviving to amaze future generations.

Respectfully,

Peter R. V. Brown
CHAIRMAN, BOARD OF DIRECTORS
ASSOCIATES OF THE BOSTON PUBLIC LIBRARY

FRONT COVER: This Persian manuscript from 1569, Wonders of Creation by Zakarîya ibn Muhammad Qazwînî, was cataloged with Associates’ funding. LEFT: Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec’s lithograph, Jane Avril, 1899, was digitized with Associates’ support, and exhibited in the MFA’s exhibition, Toulouse-Lautrec and the Stars of Paris.
CONSERVATION

Fundamental to our core preservation goals, the Associates funded the work of Conservation Officer, Lauren Schott, who repaired, cleaned, and/or rehoused 75 items from the Special Collections last year. This work focused on items from the Library’s collections of Incunabula (books printed before 1501), Medieval Manuscripts, Colonial and Revolutionary Boston, Anti-Slavery, Serge Koussevitzky, Walter Piston, William Dwiggins, and the Ticknor Library of Spanish and Portuguese Literature.

The breadth of Lauren’s work is truly extraordinary. Her projects included rebinding Gesta Romanorum, a first German-language printing of a popular collection of anecdotes and stories dating to 1487, and a mid-14th century Latin Missal, one of a handful of English manuscripts in the BPL’s Medieval and Early Renaissance Collection. She created custom enclosures for a 1787 copy of the U.S. Constitution which once belonged to John Adams and is inscribed by John Quincy Adams; Paul Revere’s 1770 etching depicting the Boston Massacre, The Bloody Massacre Perpetrated in King-Street Boston; anarchists Nicola Sacco and Bartolomeo Vanzetti’s death masks from 1927; and the pattern pike that abolitionist John Brown used to commission 1,000 pikes which he intended to use as arms in a slave uprising. She also rehoused a rare, lavishly illustrated 18th century miniature Passover Haggadah by the Bohemian artist Meschullam Zimmel.

CATALOGING

In order for scholars and the public to easily locate items within the Library’s vast holdings, the materials must be carefully electronically cataloged. Rare Books and Manuscript Cataloger Lenore Rouse, whose position is funded by the Associates, completed full-level complex cataloging for 213 items this year, primarily focused on medieval and early renaissance manuscripts and early Americana documents. Three dramatically different examples of materials that she cataloged include:

• A 16th century manuscript copy of the so-called Wonders of Creation, written by Zakarīyā ibn Muhammad Qazwīnī in the latter half of the 13th century. This work of cosmology—the makeup of the known universe—is considered to have been, at one point, one of the most popular books in the Islamic world.

• Roger Williams’ 1664 argument for the separation of church and state, The bloody tenent, of persecution, for cause of conscience, discussed, in a conference betweene truth and peace. Who, in all tender affection, present to the high court of Parliament, (as the result of their discourse) these, (amongst other passages) of highest consideration, which is considered one of the most important pieces of early Americana, as Williams used his deep rhetorical skills to press the case for religious and political tolerance.

• Hailed by some to be the finest piece of silver to have been crafted in Boston, an ornate vase that was made by the Boston silversmith Obadiah Rich and presented to U.S. Senator Daniel Webster, by the people of Boston, following his involvement in the nullification crisis of 1832-1833.

EXTERNAL CONSERVATION

The Associates also underwrites work by external specialists, mostly from Northeast Document Conservation Center (NEDCC), when an item requires specialized preservation. Some of the items that were externally conserved and digitized this year include:

• A Compilation of New England Laws, which contains rare early printings of colonial laws that were once bound together in a single volume. This includes the first printing of the Connecticut Constitution, the second edition of the laws of the Plymouth Colony (1672), and the third edition of the laws of the Massachusetts Colony (1672).

• Life of St. Augustine is an illustrated manuscript that is still in its original binding from the late 15th century. Prior to sending it to NEDCC, it was simply too fragile to be opened or otherwise handled.

• The Quebriac Hours is a luxuriously and extensively decorated book of hours, produced in France around 1430.

• Saint Jerome, De Viris Illustribus, with chronicles of Eusebius of Caesarea, Prosper of Aquitaine, and Siegebert of Gembloux is a manuscript—copied in France around 1150—made up of four separate works: Saint Jerome’s collection of short biographies, On Illustrious Men, and three other chronicles.

• Two volumes of Giovanni Battista Piranesi’s etchings of Italy, Antichità Romanae and Antichità D’Albano (the Antiquities of Rome and Albano respectively), which were assembled by Cardinal Antonio Tosti in the 1830s. This preservation work was completed in honor of Vivian K. Spiro and her twenty years of inspirational leadership as the Associates’ Chairman.

• Saxoleine, a late 19th century lithograph by French artist Jules Chéret, who has been called the “father of the modern poster.”

ROLLED POSTER ASSESSMENT

The Associates undertook an assessment of almost 200 rolled lithographs and other posters from the Print Department that were deemed too fragile to even be opened during the Library’s Print Inventory. A paper conservator assessed the delicate posters to gain a better understanding of the physical character of these objects, whether some of them could be safely unrolled at the BPL, and which ones would require off-site work.
LEFT: Obadiah Rich’s silver vase was presented to Senator Daniel Webster by the citizens of Boston following his involvement in the nullification crisis of 1832-1833. The Associates-funded conservator built a custom enclosure to ensure its safe keeping.

RIGHT: This 1569 Latin liturgical text and music accompaniment, Processional according to the Order of St. Jerome, was cataloged and digitized with Associates' support.

PHOTOGRAPHY INVENTORY
The BPL holds well over a million photographs, across all of the major formats and processes from daguerreotypes to albumen prints to salted paper prints, as well as historic newspaper photographs documenting Boston and national news. After completing the Print Inventory last year, the BPL sought to enhance documentation of its Photography Collection in a similar project. The Associates funded Dr. Martha Mahard, five team leads, and thirteen interns, mostly from Simmons University, to inventory a treasure trove of photographs and negatives. During the full project, 260,628 photographic materials were inventoried. This number does not include the Boston Herald-Traveleer photo morgue which is composed of approximately one million items and remains on the list of future projects we hope to support.

DIGITIZATION
Once an item is conserved, whether internally or externally, the Associates is committed to also making it accessible (whenever possible) through digitization and online access. Items digitized this past year include incunabula, medieval manuscripts, items from the Barton Shakespeariana Collection, and much more. The Associates funded a combination of BPL part-time staff and external vendors, such as the nonprofit Internet Archive, to complete this work. We also purchased equipment where it was necessary, such as a light box which doubled the number of negatives that can be scanned at one time.

A team of five part-time Associates-funded photographers and metadata specialists digitized a stunning 13,396 prints, drawings, and photographs from the Library’s Print Department, including works by Thomas Rowlandson, Paul Gavarni, Frank W. Benson, John Copley, and Rocco Paoletta.

Boston’s tax records—far from being dry and dusty lists of payments—contain a bonanza of details about life in the city. The documents from 1780 to 1821 were digitized from microfilm, offering broad access to city researchers, genealogists, historians, and those with an interest in understanding more about what our city was like 200 years ago. The tax records include who lived near whom; first-hand observations about the conditions of housing; detailed notes on taxpayers’ professions, races, and ethnicities; the names of business partners and apprentices; records of imprisonment and death; and even periods of time when mariners were at sea.

Over the last seven years, we’ve funded the conservation of William Lloyd Garrison’s personal copies of The Liberator—spanning the full 35 years of its publication. As this project came to a conclusion, we purchased archival folders and boxes to properly store the delicate issues. The external conservation and rehousing are now complete, and we anticipate that the corresponding internal digitization will be finished within the year.
ANTI-SLAVERY LETTER TRANSCRIPTION PROJECT

Over the last nine years Associates-funded staff have cataloged and digitized major portions of the BPL’s extensive collection of Anti-Slavery correspondence. In order to make the manuscripts more valuable to researchers, scholars, and historians, the library is collaborating with the crowd-sourcing website Zooniverse.org to enable the public to assist in transcribing these documents into machine readable text. Once the handwritten correspondence has been digitized and transcribed, it will dramatically increase the number of people who can access them and the types of data-based research in which they can be used. The process of transcribing the over 10,000 manuscripts is now well underway, with 3,628 letters transcribed by over 4,800 volunteers to date. Historian and Associates Board member Peter Drummey proclaimed “Through the participation of citizen historians, we now stand on the threshold of having available — free to all — the contents of the Boston Public Library’s extraordinary Anti-Slavery Manuscripts collection: the personal papers of women and men who joined together, across barriers of race and class, in the Abolitionist crusade.” To join this crowdsourced effort, please see: www.antislaverymanuscripts.org/.

TOULOUSE-LAUTREC EXHIBITION

The Associates was excited to be a part of the joint Museum of Fine Arts, Boston and BPL’s exhibition, Toulouse-Lautrec and the Stars of Paris, which featured over 200 works by the artist, half of which came from the BPL’s collections. In preparation, the Associates underwrote the external conservation and framing of nine over-sized posters in fragile condition, in collaboration with the Museum. The process was a painstaking and challenging one because, as one of the conservators noted, “Posters are ephemeral objects, printed on cheap paper, and not meant to last.” The Associates also funded a mini satellite exhibit in the BPL’s Johnson Lobby which displayed the recently conserved Toulouse-Lautrec prints on a rotating basis. This served the dual purpose of educating the public about the need to conserve the remarkable items in the Library’s Special Collections and to make them aware of the MFA exhibition, free admission to which was provided to BPL card holders throughout the month of June.

TRAINING

A key piece of the support we provide each year to the Special Collections Department is the opportunity for staff to receive additional training and professional development. This year BPL staff members attended the New England Museum Association’s Annual Conference, the American Institute for Conservation Annual Meeting, the American Library Association Rare Books and Manuscripts Section Meeting, and the Center for Collections Care’s Paper Conservation training. These learning opportunities will directly impact how the staff care for the Library’s collections.

LEFT: The engraved title page to Paolo Giovio’s 1553 The Life and Chronicle of Goncalo Hernandez, from the BPL’s Ticknor Library of Spanish and Portuguese Literature was cataloged and digitized with Associates’ funding. CENTER: Théophile Alexandre Steinlen’s print Chat Assis (Sitting Cat), ca. 1881–1920, was digitized with funding from the Associates’ David McCullough Conservation Fund. RIGHT: Boston’s historical tax records from 1780 to 1821 were externally digitized with Associates’ support and provide a virtual treasure trove of details about life in the city during that era.
PROGRAMS AND EVENTS

WRITER-IN-RESIDENCE
The Associates sponsors an annual Writer-in-Residence fellowship for an emerging author writing for children or young adults. Our 15th author, Jorge Vega, spent his residency writing *Bottled*, the story of a lonely middle school girl who makes friends with a fugitive genie. A welcome reception for Jorge was held in October 2018.

HUNDRED-YEAR RETROACTIVE BOOK AWARD OF 1918
In November 2018, the Associates hosted its popular Hundred-Year Retroactive Book Award to weigh the enduring literary merits of bestsellers published in 1918. The three books nominated were Booth Tarkington’s *The Magnificent Ambersons*, Willa Cather’s *My Antonia*, and William Strunk Jr.’s *Elements of Style*. Arguing for these books were, respectively, investment adviser and novelist John D. Spooner, columnist Alex Beam, and *Boston Globe* editor Shirley Leung. At this free and entertaining evening, the public in attendance voted on the winner: *My Antonia*.

PIERCE PERFORMANCE SERIES
In March 2019, the Associates sponsored its inaugural Pierce Performance Series event, a newly endowed annual performance that highlights and celebrates materials in the Special Collections. The first event was a concert commemorating the 150th anniversary of the Peace Jubilee held in Copley Square in June of 1869. The Jubilee—a patriotic celebration of the end of the Civil War—brought together 10,000 vocalists, over 1,000 musicians, and 100 firefighters hammering anvils to perform for 30,000 attendees over five days. At the time, it was the largest concert held in America. The BPL holds original programs, music scores, illustrations, and historic photographs of the concert.

Our 2019 commemorative concert took place in a single evening at the Library, steps from the original location. Produced in collaboration with the New England Conservatory (NEC), the event featured speakers, vocalists, and musicians playing selected pieces from the original concert and related music. Among the speakers were Professor Theodore Landsmark, educator, attorney, architect and social activist, and Porsha Olayiwola, Boston’s current Poet Laureate. Music was performed by the New England Conservatory Wind Ensemble and Chamber Singers. They were joined by the Greater Boston Firefighters Pipes and Drums striking anvils to mirror the original event. A video of the event can be viewed on the Associates’ website: www.associatesbpl.org/2019/04/04/peace-jubilee/.

LITERARY LIGHTS
In April 2019, the Associates hosted its 31st annual Literary Lights dinner honoring distinguished authors from the Northeast. Dan Brown, the renowned author of numerous bestsellers, including *The Da Vinci Code*, gave the evening’s keynote address. In his remarks he offered moving thoughts on the pivotal importance of books in our world today, describing them as “magical artifacts that share ideas...”
across borders, across cultures, across languages, and above all across time.” The dinner also honored journalist Jeffrey Toobin, novelist Jennifer Haigh, memoirist John Grogan, novelist Min Jin Lee, and young-adult author Jeff Kinney. Vivian K. Spiro received an honorary award acknowledging her retirement as the Associates’ Chairman.

PANEL DISCUSSION: PRESERVING TOULOUSE-LAUTREC’S POSTERS
Timed to coincide with the Toulouse-Lautrec exhibition at the MFA, the Associates and the Library co-sponsored a public panel discussion in May 2019. BPL Preservation Manager Jessica Bitely moderated a conversation with NEDCC’s Assistant Paper Conservator and Senior Collections Photographer to shine a light on the behind-the-scenes process to conserve and digitize the posters used in the exhibition and how some of the complicated collections care decisions were made. This critical work—which makes public access possible but is rarely publicized—relies on extensive collaboration among professionals in curation, preservation, conservation, imaging, and framing.

LOOKING AHEAD

STAFFING
The Associates is pleased to start supporting four new positions, two of which were filled by promotions from within. In June 2019, the BPL promoted two staff members into new positions—Aaron Schmidt was appointed the Curator of Photography, and Monica Shin became a Visual Materials Cataloger. In July 2019, Michael Wilkerson was hired as a second Visual Materials Cataloger after completing his work as a team lead on the BPL’s Print Inventory, and in August 2019 Julia Featheringill was hired as a part-time Fragile Materials Photographer bringing a wealth of experience from digitizing rare materials at Harvard University. We look forward to seeing their contributions over the years to come.

RENOVATION
In addition, construction is underway for a $15.7 million City-funded renovation of the space housing the BPL’s Rare Books and Manuscripts. The principal goal of the project is to improve the environmental and mechanical systems to better regulate the department’s temperature and humidity control. When the department reopens in 2021, it will also feature a renovated lobby display space, reading room, conservation lab, staff spaces, and a new classroom, along with improvements to security and shelving. Along with everyone else in the Library, we can’t wait to see it!
DEAR FRIENDS,

Thank you for your continued support and belief in the Associates of the Boston Public Library. Due to your generosity, during Fiscal Year 2019 the Associates was able to make our largest grant to date to the BPL. This grant of $639,680 was used to accomplish the large volume of work outlined in this report.

Financially, the Associates has two goals—to underwrite current conservation, cataloging, digitization, and exhibition of the BPL’s Special Collections, while also saving for the future so that preservation activities can continue at the BPL in perpetuity.

As of June 30, 2019, the Associates’ assets totaled $7,616,100. This demonstrates tremendous growth over the last decade; in comparison on June 30, 2009 our assets totaled $1,462,930.

During Fiscal Year 2019, the Associates raised $1,073,300 without considering increases in the existing assets’ market value. The total expenses for the year came to $894,520, including our grant to the Library. Some of the highlights from our fundraising efforts include:

- Literary Lights, the Associates’ annual dinner that honors outstanding authors while supporting our preservation efforts, grossed $467,170 and netted $355,110.
- An anonymous benefactor donated $300,000 as the fourth installment of a multi-year grant via the Boston Foundation.
- Other grant funding totaled $155,000, including dedicated funding for our Writer-in-Residence program.
- Other fundraising initiatives, including membership and the annual appeal, together raised $151,130.

The following charts provide a picture of our income and expenses (unaudited) for Fiscal Year 2019, and the Associates’ total grantmaking to the BPL over the last six years.

Respectfully,

Anita Lincoln

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Thank You to all of you who supported the Associates during the last year. We could not have accomplished all the work described in this report without you!

RIGHT: This 1956 image of Adlai Stevenson campaigning for President in Boston's Downtown Crossing is from the BPL's Brearley Collection of Press Photography. It is one of thousands of photographs inventoried this year as part of the Associates-funded photography inventory.

BACK COVER: Frank Weston Benson's watercolor Crows, 1936, was digitized as part of the Associates-funded print digitization initiative.
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