

Volume 31, Number 1, Spring 2024

Books & People

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The Library is 270 Years Old!

How does today's Library life compare with our founding times in the 1750s? We took a look at what's different and what's the same.



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NUMBER OF PUBLIC LIBRARIES IN NEW YORK CITY

In our founding era 1
Today 223

POPULATION OF THE THIRTEEN COLONIES/UNITED STATES

In our founding era ~1,170,800
Today ~340,980,068

POPULATION OF NEW YORK CITY

In our founding era ~25,000
Today ~8.3 million

PERCENTAGE OF MANHATTAN'S POPULATION WITH FUNCTIONAL LITERACY

In our founding era 65%
Today 75%

AVERAGE LIFE EXPECTANCY

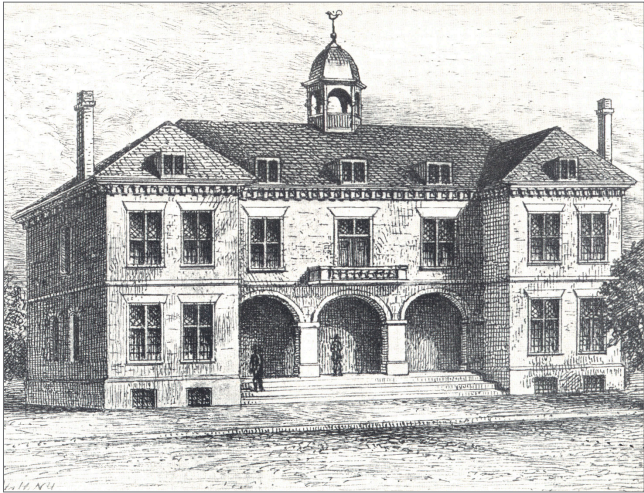
In our founding era 64 years
Today 71 years

WHERE THE LIBRARY WAS LOCATED

In our founding era City Hall
Today 53 East 79th Street

Market Street							
130							
And his own house	230					2199	1196 3919 302 149
James Wilson	231					3	3 5
(Wor)	232						
Balthus Emuck	233					1	2 6
Abigail Schultze	234					4	3
Elizabeth Potts	235						1
John Hunkle	236					1	2 3
(Wor)	237						
Thomas Murgatroyd	238					1	3 1 2
Daniel Russell	239					2	1 3
Thomas Mygale	240					2	3 2
Ann York	241						1 2
(Wor)	242						
Wm. J. P. P. P.	243						

A census record from 1790, courtesy of the National Archives



City Hall in the 18th century, from the Library's archives

Greetings from the Head Librarian

By now you've no doubt heard the exciting news that we have embarked upon an important building renovation project that will provide us with much needed space for books and for people (more on page 7). I've been so charmed by all your lovely notes about the plans, and one thing is clear: you love this Library! One well-wisher wrote me that "the New York Society Library is a treasure and a pleasure" and I think I'll be using that as our new tagline! Another member wrote that the Library is her favorite destination in New York City, and now there will be more to love about it.

I'm excited about the possibilities in opening up the fourth floor not only for member reading and study, but for receptions, events, and opportunities to bring in school groups and others to learn about the Library's history and unique collections.

Creating the new rear-yard wing for semi-rare books and folios (currently in our Closed Stack level) means that we will have more room in the interior to purchase and house circulating books for many years to come and, most importantly, to house our entire collection in this building. Those of you who use other libraries with offsite storage will appreciate what this level of accessibility means.

And our exceptional staff will finally have suitable, well-appointed, efficient working spaces in which to do their jobs. I think we can all appreciate how important that is as well!

Thank you again for all your wonderful notes. Keep them coming! I will continue to keep you abreast of the plans and status of the project. In the meantime, please reach out if you have questions or comments.

—Carolyn Waters,
Head Librarian



OPEN HOURS OF THE LIBRARY PER WEEK

In our founding era **Wednesdays,
2:00-4:00 PM**

Today **7 days a week for a total
of 58 hours**

NUMBER OF LIBRARY STAFF

In our founding era **1**

Today **32**

NUMBER OF ROOMS IN THE LIBRARY

In our founding era **1**

Today **31**

Above: the Hornblower Room

NUMBER OF BOOKS PUBLISHED IN ENGLISH

In our founding era **~3 million total
up to the year 1800**

Today **1-4 million per year**

NUMBER OF BOOKS IN THE LIBRARY'S COLLECTION

In our founding era **700**

Today **~300,000**

THE LIBRARY'S CLASSIFICATION SYSTEM

In our founding era **numerical,
with each book receiving an
acquisitions number**

Today **Dewey Decimal Classification**

HOW PATRONS FOUND BOOKS IN OUR COLLECTION

In our founding era **leafing through
a book**

Today **searching our online catalog**

Below: our earliest printed catalog

NUMBER OF CHILDREN'S BOOKS IN OUR COLLECTION

In our founding era **0**

Today **~10,000**

NUMBER OF e-BOOKS IN OUR COLLECTION

In our founding era **0**

Today **2,679**

WAYS WE SHARED NEWS AND ACQUISITIONS

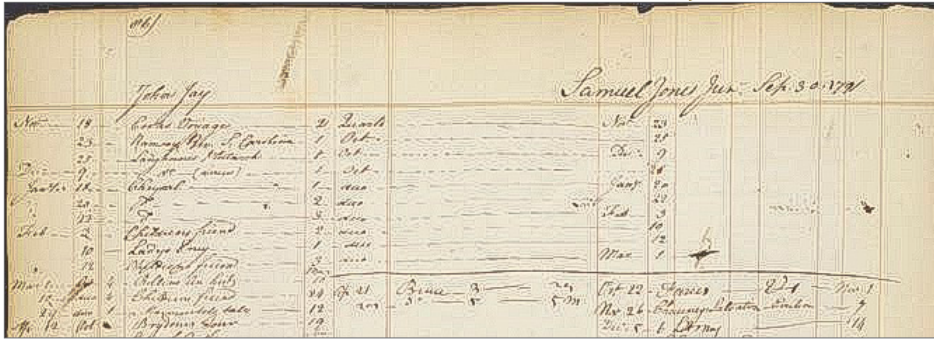
In our founding era **newspaper
advertisements**

Today **New Books List**

Below: the *New York Mercury* article about
our founding



NEW-YORK, April 8.
A Subscription is now on Foot, and carried on
with great Spirit, in order to raise Money for erec-
ting and maintaining a publick Library in this City;
and we hear that not less than 70 Gentlemen have
already subscribed *Five Pounds* Principal, and *Ten
Shillings per Annum*, for that Purpose. We make



NUMBER OF LIBRARY MEMBERSHIPS

In our founding era 117
Today almost 3,000

COST OF A MEMBERSHIP

In our founding era 5 British pounds
Today \$350 for a family

HOW BOOKS WERE CHECKED OUT

In our founding era handwritten in a ledger
Today scanned into a computer
Above: an early ledger page

HOW MANY BOOKS A MEMBER COULD CHECK OUT AT A TIME

In our founding era one per share
Today up to 30

HOW LONG BOOKS COULD BE KEPT OUT

In our founding era from two to six weeks depending on the size
Today four weeks, except for select high-demand items

TECHNOLOGY FOR READING PRINT

In our founding era daylight, candlelight, or oil lamps
Today electric light
At right: one of our character-filled stack lights

TECHNOLOGY FOR READING AUDIOBOOKS

In our founding era reading aloud in groups
Today downloadable digital files, or CDs

WHAT WAS SERVED AT BOARD OF TRUSTEES MEETINGS

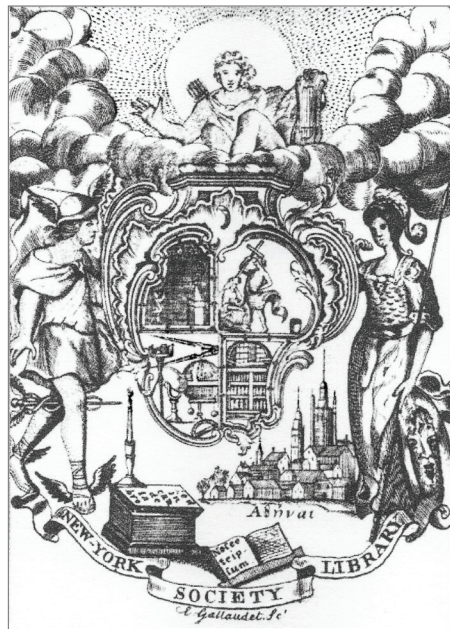
In our founding era Madeira, walnuts, and oysters
Today Madeira

PERCENTAGE OF BOARD MEMBERS WHO ARE WOMEN

In our founding era 0
Today 53%

OUR BOOKPLATE

In our founding era this one
Today this one again



Meet New Staff

We are pleased to introduce two new staff members in 2024:



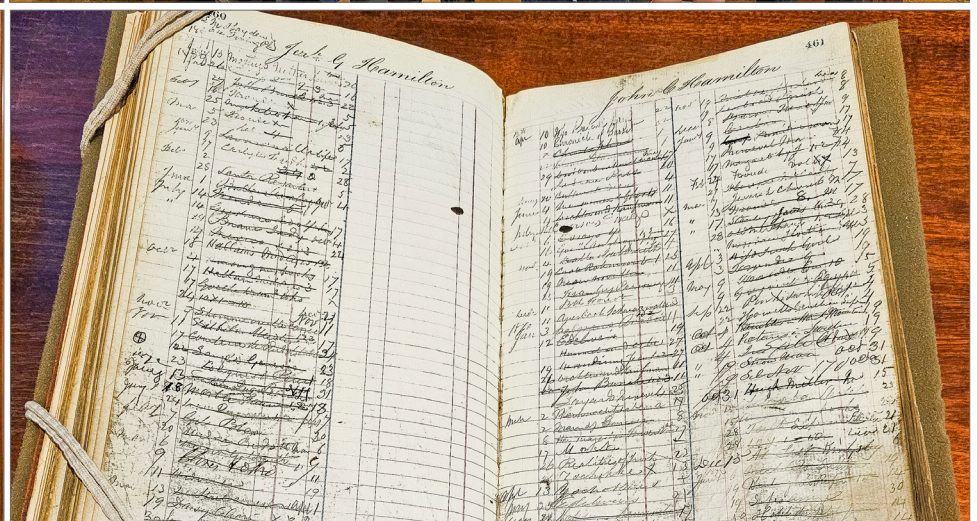
Tienya Smith is our new Director of Engagement, Partnerships & Outreach. In this role, she will be responsible for improving the member and visitor experience and strengthening and expanding the Library community through outreach and partnerships. Tienya comes to us from Queens Public Library, where she was a Community Library Manager overseeing a fast-paced, high-traffic library branch where she used design thinking and AI-based tools to create programs and address patron issues. She is already hard at work developing a volunteer docent program for us, among other projects. Tienya graduated from Shippensburg University with a B.A. in English Literature, holds a Master of Library and Information Science (MLIS) degree from the University of Pittsburgh, and is an alumna of the Harvard Business School's Business Analytics Program.

Eric Wolf is our new Director of Collections and will oversee the Library's Acquisitions, Cataloging, Special Collections, and Conservation departments. Eric was formerly Head Librarian at Sotheby's Institute of Art, Head Librarian at the Menil Collection, and the Director of the New York School of Interior Design Library, and he has held cataloging positions at the Frick Art Reference Library and LaGuardia and Wagner Archives. Eric graduated from the University of California, Santa Cruz with a B.A. in Art History and has a Master of Arts (MA) and PhD in Art History from Harvard University. He holds a Master of Library & Information Science (MLIS) degree from Pratt Institute.

Recent Events



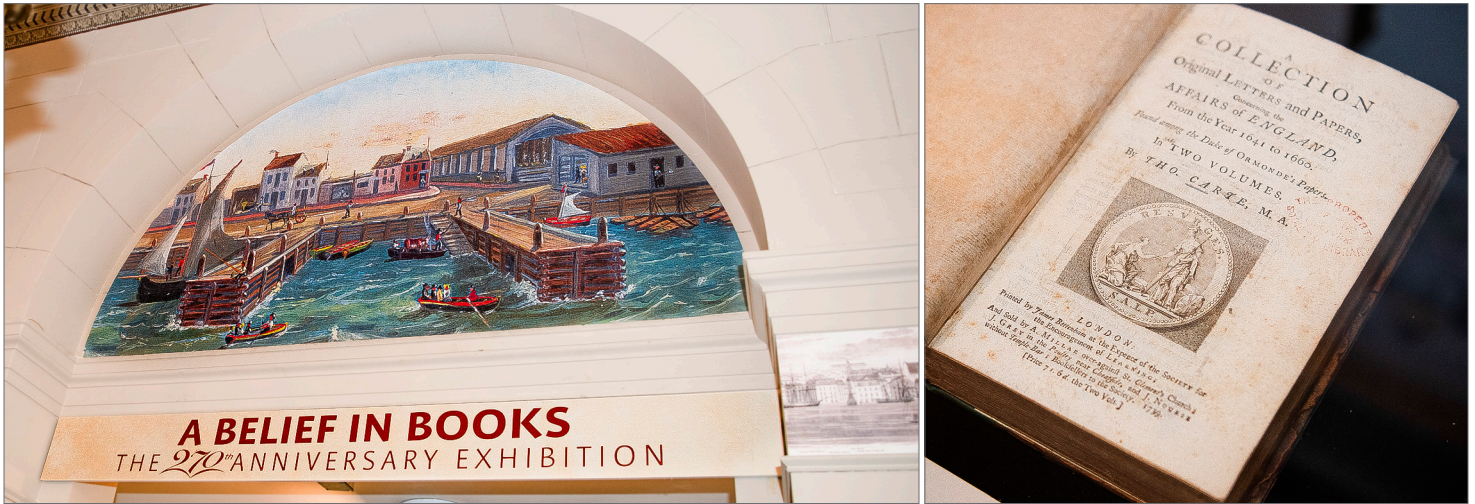
Top: Children enjoyed a visit to Robert Quackenbush's art studio, hosted by Margery Quackenbush, November 5; Kalynn Bayron signed one of her books for a teen at our Young Adult event, December 2; Helen Ellis greeted new members at a December 6 reception; mystery writers Danielle Arceneaux, S.J. Rozan, and Paul Vidich discussed their craft, December 5; Singer-songwriter Nano Raies and her band brought songs of many cultures to the Members' Room, December 10; Member writer Emma Otheguy shared her writing process and her vibrant story *Martina Has Too Many Tías* with children, January 28



We celebrated so many member writers on December 12; Gregory Pardlo read from his new collection *Spectral Evidence*, February 5; winners and judges of the 2nd annual Young Cartoonists Awards celebrated on February 13; Prof. Leslie Harris presented the keynote lecture for our *A Belief in Books* exhibition on February 22, showing a related record of circulation for Jeremiah G. Hamilton, a Library member known as Wall Street's first Black millionaire.

Our 270th Year Opens with A Belief in Books

The Library officially opened our 270th anniversary year with a reception celebrating our new exhibition, *A Belief in Books*, on January 17. More than sixty members and friends were on hand to enjoy specialty drinks and a first look at the display of 18th-century books and correspondence, plus historical research and images. Members enjoyed a Dark and Stormy with period-appropriate rum. Muffy and Xavier Flouret generously donate wine for Library events, and Goslings Rum provided rum and ginger beer for this event. *A Belief in Books* is open to the public during the Library's open hours in the Peluso Family Exhibition Gallery through December 31, 2024. (photos by Karen Smul)



Longtime trustee Ellen M. Iseman with Assemblymember Alex Bores

A Transformative Renovation

Read the full February 28 announcement about the Library's transformative renovation project on our website at tinyurl.com/NYSLRenovation0228.

The renovation kicked off on March 4 with the demolition of the rear yard slab, marking the beginning of **Phase 1**: Rear Yard Storage Wing for semi-rare books and folios. **Phase 1** is expected to take 5 to 7 months.

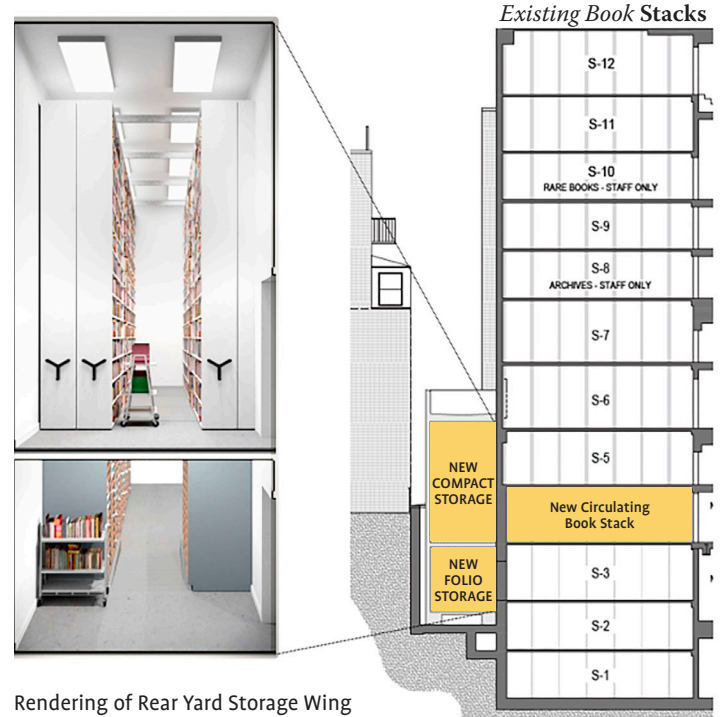
IN PHASE 2, which will begin in early summer, we will embark on interior renovations that will provide a new flexible-use space for members and for events on the fourth floor. The fourth floor will also house the new rare book reading room, book conservation studio, and Controller and Head Librarian's offices. The current CS (Closed Stack) level will be renovated to house staff from various departments: Member & Visitor Services, Acquisitions, Cataloging, Development, and Events. A new stairwell from the first floor to the staff level will provide a second means of egress in the event of an emergency. On the first floor, stack 4 will be reopened to house books, as it was originally intended. We'll also be adding new bathroom fixtures, including ADA-compliant bathrooms, re-opening a telephone room off the main stairwell, and creating a new 2-person study space on the fifth floor.

What to expect while we're renovating:

First and foremost: the Library will remain open and accessible throughout the renovation.

IN PHASE 1, all of the work will be in the rear yard, and while there will be some noise, it should not be too awful! Contractors will use a corridor through the closed stack level to transport materials and supplies, so the first floor will be unaffected. Some materials from stack 3 have been temporarily removed, and members may ask staff to retrieve them. At some point, for a short period, stack 3 will be closed to members, but staff will be able to fetch books as needed.

IN PHASE 2, the work will move inside the building, and therefore more noise can be expected. The work will be taking place in the closed stack level, the fourth floor (currently off-limits to members), and eventually, the first floor. At this stage, the Reference Room will likely be closed to members and visitors so that we can temporarily house staff who will be displaced by the construction in current work areas. We will work to find a way to continue holding Teatime! Members who use the catalog terminals in the Reference Room can alternatively ask a staff member for assistance, or use the terminals on stacks 5 or 6 and on the fifth floor.



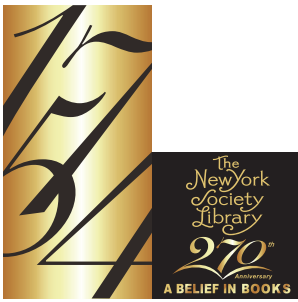
Rendering of Rear Yard Storage Wing



Rendering of new 4th floor study space



Rendering of new staff space



53 East 79th Street
New York, NY 10075

T. 212.288.6900
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This newsletter is available
in electronic form at
[nysoclib.org
/about/newsletters](http://nysoclib.org/about/newsletters)

One More Picture



Representative Jerry Nadler visited on January 22 and enjoyed a look at a historic ledger.