

LIBRARY NOTES

THE NEW YORK SOCIETY LIBRARY NEWSLETTER
VOLUME 2, NUMBER 1, FEBRUARY 1995

AN EVENING WITH JAMES BOSWELL

HENRY S. F. COOPER, JR.

A dramatic reading by Sam Waterston from a new play, *An Evening with James Boswell*, by Richard Goodyear, will be the Library's first benefit. This reading, produced by the Library for one evening only, will be held at Weill Hall (part of Carnegie Hall) on Thursday, May 11, at 7:00 P.M. The event will be introduced by Library member Dick Cavett and will conclude with a champagne-and-strawberry reception. Invitations will be sent early in March.

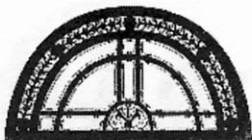
The curtain opens on a scene of some disarray....Boswell, now in his mid-fifties (played by Sam Waterston), is sitting in his study late at night, working his way through a bottle of port and reading reviews of his *Life of Johnson* that has just been published. All around him are sheaves from his journal, which he now has to put away in his ebony cabinet...offering an opportunity to put his own life in order at the same time.

The reviews, though generally laudatory of the *Life*, are less than enthusiastic about the author: "The eccentricities of Mr. Boswell, it is useless to detail" or "Mr. Boswell, with some exceptions on the score of egotism..." "Yes...well," Boswell mutters, reading aloud to the audience with some discomfort. The reviews put him in a reflective and melancholy frame of mind, as he picks up scraps of his journal, reading sections to the audience...passages about death, about hangings, about his recently deceased wife, about many things....

The play is more than just a series of excerpts; it takes us on an idiosyncratic path through Boswell's life, attaining a life of its own. Its author, Richard Goodyear, is (like Boswell) a lawyer in his fifties, though rather more successful as a lawyer than his subject, and (also like Boswell) a long-time Boswell aficionado. At Yale, Goodyear acted at the Dramat with Sam Waterston. Sometimes called "the thinking man's actor," Waterston is familiar to Library members from many New York Shakespeare Festival roles; films, "The Killing Fields;" Broadway, "Abe Lincoln in Illinois;" and television, "Law and Order." Dick Cavett, also a Yale graduate, has been, since 1968, the host of highly acclaimed television talk shows as well as a Broadway actor. Save the date!



Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University
James Boswell (1740-1795). Pencil sketch of 1791 by
Sir Thomas Lawrence.



B I O G R A P H Y P R O J E C T

BIOGRAPHY LECTURE SERIES



On Thursday, February 16, at 6:30 P.M. at the Society for Ethical Culture auditorium, 2 West 64th Street, Judith Thurman will give the second program in the 1994-95 Biography Series. Thurman won the National Book Award for her biography of Isak Dinesen, *The Life of A Story Teller*. Her talk, "Secrets of the Flesh: Trying To Decode Colette," will be based on her biography in progress of that author.

The final program of the 1994-95

Series will be held at the same location and time on Thursday, March 16. Entitled "Small Screen Lives: Biography on Television," its panelists will be Geoffrey C. Ward, principal writer of the PBS series "The Civil War," "Baseball," "Nixon," and "The Kennedys;" Judy Crichton, Executive Producer of the American Experience series, also on PBS; David Grubin, filmmaker of the "Wyeths," "LBJ," and "FDR;" and Orlando Bagwell, film biographer of Malcolm X and Frederick Douglass.

The Biography Project, funded by the Lila Wallace-Reader's Digest Fund, was developed by Geoffrey Ward and the Library, in association with the National Humanities Center and Thirteen/WNET.

Tickets to these programs are available at the Library's Circulation Desk. They are free to Library members and their guests (\$8 to non-members).

THE ART OF BIOGRAPHY FOR YOUNG PEOPLE

Starting Tuesday, February 7, at 3:45 P.M. and continuing on February 14, February 28, and March 7, the Library will offer a new component of the Biography Project: a four-part program on the Art of Biography for children 8-12. Jamie Winnick, an actress, director, and teacher who has worked in regional theater for twenty years, will lead the group, using storytelling, theater games, and improvisation. The final session will be a "summit meeting" of the famous and not-so-famous people the group has discussed. These sessions, too, are funded by the Lila Wallace-Reader's Digest Fund.

This four-part program is free to members' children but reservations are required as class size is limited. For information and reservations, call the Library at (212) 288-6703.

TO LIBRARY MEMBERS

WILLIAM J. DEAN, CHAIRMAN
BOARD OF TRUSTEES

The Founding Fathers took advantage of the Library's collection when New York City served as the nation's capital in 1789 and 1790. The Library was then located in Federal Hall--the refurbished old City Hall on Wall Street facing Broad Street--where Congress met. Members not only of Congress but of the administration as well regularly consulted the collection.

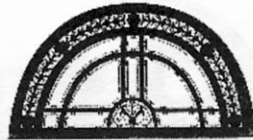
Vice-President John Adams came by one day to pick up Kames' *Elements of Criticism*, volume 1. The charge in the ledger is followed by the note, "self." Several days later he sent the doorkeeper ("doork.") for volume 2.

On October 5, 1789, President Washington requested Emer De Vattel's *The Law of Nations*. Alexander Hamilton borrowed Goethe's *Eleonora*, and Aaron Burr, *Revolutions in Geneva* and a volume of Swift.

The Library has plans to display some of the early charging ledgers and other treasures from our 240-year history in an exhibition area to be located on the second-floor landing near the entrance to the Members' Room.

The New York Society Library was founded in 1754 by a civic-minded group, the New York Society, in the belief that the availability of books would help the city to prosper. The Library is free to all for reading and reference. Members can take books out, use the reading and study rooms on upper floors, and browse in the stacks. A family membership is \$135 a year.

We welcome your comments on *Library Notes* and your suggestions for future issues. Please address them to: *Library Notes*, The New York Society Library, 53 East 79th Street, New York, N.Y. 10021. For information about Library hours, events, and membership, call (212) 288-6900.



Members' Reading Room, 53 East 79th Street, circa 1940.

THE WALLET

Barbara H. Stanton, Development Committee Chair

Celebrations and reciprocal congratulations are in order! Because of the wonderful support of the Library's members--you, gentle readers--the 1993-1994 Annual Appeal raised \$86,290. This is the largest amount in three years and an increase of 17% over the 1992-1993 Appeal. Moreover, as of January 4, 1995, the 1994-1995 Appeal stood at \$72,164--ahead of last year at this time. Yet more, the Capital Campaign wallet also is larger than ever, with over \$633,000 in gifts and pledges.

The Annual Appeal runs from November to November each year and supplies approximately 10% of the Library's operating budget, particularly its book-buying funds. Contributions to the Capital Campaign, launched in 1993, will be used for one-time expenditures for collection conservation, upgrading,

and computerization, and for selected building refurbishments such as elevator modernization.

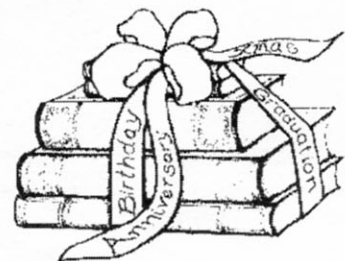
Both the Annual Appeal and the Capital Campaign are essential if the Library is to continue to serve its members as it has in the past. Let us not rest on our laurels, however well-deserved!

This "Wallet" contains a clip-out coupon, at right, which can be used to fulfil the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) disclosure requirements added under the Omnibus Budget and Reconciliation Act of 1993 (OBRA). One of the OBRA requirements is that a taxpayer seeking a charitable deduction for a contribution of \$250 or more made on or after January 1, 1994, be able to present to the IRS a written acknowledgement from the charitable recipient (in this case, the Library) stating that the charity has not fur-

nished to the donor any gifts or services (or, if it has, what their value is). All Library donors of \$250 or more since January 1, 1994 (donations are in addition to the membership fee) will be sent such a written statement confirming the full tax-deductibility of their contribution--and our future contribution acknowledgements will be amended to conform to OBRA requirements.

However, if for some reason the new written statement becomes misplaced, our lawyers tell us that the Library acknowledgement sent each donor at the time of the contribution plus the following wording as published in this *Library Notes* will suffice as confirmation for the IRS:

The New York Society Library is a 501(c)(3) corporation. Contributions are fully tax-deductible. No goods or services have been or will be provided to you in consideration for your donation. You should retain this acknowledgement for your tax records.



Give a NYSL membership, today



SHELF TALK

MARK PIEL, LIBRARIAN

Our monthly Book List is only a partial sampling of titles added each month. For a complete listing (apart from that in the card catalog), please ask at the Circulation Desk for our notebook which gives all titles catalogued, not just those newly received. This listing is sorted by call number.

For a desired title, please consult the new card catalog (between the windows in the Reference Room). If the card has a green overlay, it is probably a reserve book; for these titles, inquire at the Circulation Desk. For cards without green overlays, you may go directly to the stacks.

Inventory is continuing on schedule; stack 5 (Fiction A-J) is complete. Types of problems that the staff has remedied include books found on the shelf but which lack cards in the catalogs, mislabelled books (and therefore misshelved books), and missing books. The number of problems has varied from subject to subject. In stacks 11 and 12 (bibliography, psychology, philosophy, the arts) about one in every ten books required attention, while in stacks 1 and 2 (history and travel) the ratio was only one in seventeen. The next stack to be inventoried is stack 3 (religion, soci-

ology, economics, natural sciences, and philology). It is tentatively scheduled to reopen in the beginning of April. Members desiring books in a stack closed for inventory should request assistance at the desk.

Left anything in the Library? A gold bracelet, walkman, earring (only one), pen, scarves and gloves, both sun and prescription glasses and their cases? Please come to the Circulation Desk and claim what is yours.

Building renovations: Four new ceiling fixtures with both "up and down" illumination have been hung in the Reference Room, as well as the floor refinished there. Additionally, three restrooms and the staff room have been repainted.

Book Donations: Thank you to the members who donated three of the titles sought in the last issue. Here are some additional books that we need donated: *Confidence and Partial Portraits* (Henry James); *Talleyrand* (Madelin); *Complete Short Stories* (De Maupassant) in English; *American Revolution* (Edmund Morgan); *A Hundred Years of Philosophy* (Passmore); *Wide Margins* (George Putnam); *Antonia and Last Aldini* (George Sand) in English; *Diary* (Gideon Welles).

Letters

30 December 1994

Dear Mr. Piel:

It was a great delight to return to the Library before Christmas. My last visit, ten years ago, introduced me to the marvellous eighteenth- and nineteenth-century fiction of the Hammond Circulating Library. I have been travelling outside of my Cambridge teaching term to collect materials for a study of the ways in which books came to the American Colonies. Surprisingly, this has been little studied, and the surviving archives of major eighteenth-century libraries are revealing remarkable details about shipments and business transactions. The Library's own records are very valuable here, and I am now busy comparing these with others of the eighteenth century. A new *History of the Book in America* is to be published in three volumes by Oxford University Press in a few years time, and the Library will certainly feature in it. One conclusion I can reveal is how polite and patient the early committee members were in their dealings with London booksellers when compared with the more aggressive behavior of some other Library Societies (who also placed smaller orders)!

Yours sincerely,

James Raven, Fellow
Magdalene College
University of Cambridge

THE NEW YORK SOCIETY LIBRARY
53 East 79th Street
New York, N.Y. 10021

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