



The New York Society Library

Volume 25, Number 1, Spring 2018

# Books & People

## IN THIS ISSUE

## The Writer & Her Editor

### The Membership of Willa Cather & Edith Lewis *Harriet Shapiro, Head of Exhibitions*

One day in 1928, a lady dressed in an apple-green coat and matching hat climbed the steps to the New York Society Library, then located downtown at University Place. "I'd like to subscribe here if I may," the visitor said. "My name is Cather. I'm by way of being a writer."

When the American novelist Willa Cather subscribed to the Library, she joined the ranks of other distinguished member writers from Washington Irving to Herman Melville, Stephen Vincent Benét, and W.H. Auden. Less well known is the fact that Willa Cather shared the membership with her lifelong companion Edith Lewis, a successful editor and advertising executive in New York City.

Yellow charging cards on display in our exhibition *The New York World of Willa Cather* list the 311 books the couple withdrew between March 1937 and February 1947. Cards dated 1928 to 1937 were either lost or destroyed during the Library's 1937 move from University Place to its current location. Subscriber information, handwritten in black ink at the head of the cards, lists two names, an address and a telephone number: Miss Edith Lewis, Miss Cather, 570 Park Avenue, Apt. 7D, RE 4-8354. Cather was the couple's public face, but Lewis was a crucial presence, though not always entirely appreciated for the role she played in Cather's creative life.

As the charging cards reveal, the membership Cather and Lewis shared for nearly twenty years was an expression of a lifelong partnership. An in-depth study of the Cather-Lewis collaboration by Professor Melissa Homestead of the University of Nebraska-Lincoln will be published in 2020 by Oxford University Press. As Homestead said recently, "There's been this notion of Cather as an autonomous artist who did everything by herself. It's been hard for people to think about her actually collaborating." Of their editorial collaboration, Homestead writes that it "produced the polished and tightly constructed prose long recognized by readers as Cather's hallmark." Indeed, Lewis was instrumental in editing Cather's works for publication. As Robert Thacker, professor of Canadian Studies and English at St. Lawrence University, points out, Lewis was deeply involved in what he describes as "Willa Cather Inc."

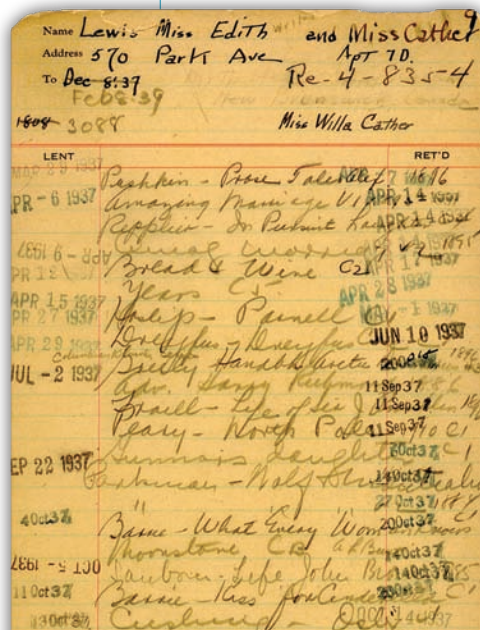


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## Greetings from the Head Librarian

I greatly enjoy my 6-8 hours a week on the Reference Desk. They give me the opportunity to meet and greet members and even to maintain my librarian chops by answering some actual reference inquiries. Not surprisingly, the questions I am asked most often are “where is the restroom?” (nonmembers) and “what’s new at the Library?” (members).

### Since you ask, here’s what’s new:

Share a glass of wine, snacks, and good cheer at our member happy hour every third Wednesday of the month, 5:30 PM in the Whitridge Room!

Join curator Harriet Shapiro on a Tuesday or Thursday for a free gallery talk about *The New York World of Willa Cather*. Check the schedule online or posted in the building.

Need more time with checked-out books? You’re in luck: we’ve increased the renewal period to four weeks.

Convey your love of the Library by sending our beautiful new postcards, featuring the building and our current exhibit. They’re on sale at the Circulation Desk at \$1.50 each or 5 for \$6.

We’re also making critical improvements to the online event registration process, and to the readability of our website and e-news, so that their responsive design will adapt to your phone, tablet, laptop, or full-sized monitor.

No doubt by the time you read this there will be something new to share, so stop by the Reference Desk and say hello. And hey, I’ll also take an honest-to-goodness reference question!



—Carolyn Waters, Head Librarian

When the couple joined the Library in 1928, Cather was securely established in the pantheon of great American writers. A winner of the 1923 Pulitzer Prize, she had gained renown for her early works, *O Pioneers!*, *The Song of the Lark*, and *My Ántonia*, novels celebrating the pioneer experience in the Midwest, as well as for *One of Ours*, *My Mortal Enemy*, and *Death Comes for the Archbishop*.

The Library had been in Cather’s sightlines for many years. In the early 1900s, newly arrived in New York City, she worked at *McClure’s Magazine* on East 23 Street, only a few blocks from the Library’s University Place location. Friends in Cather’s circle, including her former boss S.S. McClure, journalist Ida Tarbell, and *McClure’s* fiction editor Viola Roseboro’, were all Library members. Cather and Lewis traveled frequently, but when they were in town they visited the Library on an average of once a week, often borrowing several books at a time.



Books checked out by Cather and Lewis.

Much has been written about Cather’s early passion for literature. She remembered listening to her grandmother Rachel Boak read *The Pilgrim’s Progress* aloud to her during her childhood in Frederick County, Virginia. She was ten when the family moved to Red Cloud, Nebraska; and much later told Lewis that she reread *The Pilgrim’s Progress* eight times during those first winters. One significant resource was the family library, which contained 19th-century classics by Dickens, Thackeray, Poe, and Hawthorne, as well as volumes of Shakespeare and anthologies of poetry. According to Thacker, “Cather was not only a writer who valued Western tradition in literature, she embraced it.”

Russian literature also played an important role in Cather’s literary development. She was fourteen when she found paperback editions of Tolstoy in the drugstore where she worked after school. Cather recalls reading him “furiously.” On December 5, 1941, Cather/Lewis withdrew Tolstoy’s *Resurrection*, six days later *Forty-Three Tales*, and, on January 24, 1945, *The Invader and Other Stories*. In the last decade of her life it seemed as if Cather was returning once again to the books she had loved as a girl.

Cather’s interest in French literature also emerges as one of the themes of the charging cards. She began reading French when she was fifteen, but her oral command of the language was never fluent. The cards reveal that between 1937 and 1947, Cather/Lewis borrowed a number of biographies by the French writer André Maurois, including *Disraeli: A Picture of the Victorian Age*; *Voltaire*; and *Byron*, all translated into English by Hamish Miles. On January 2, 1940, Saint-Exupéry’s *Wind, Sand and Stars*, translated by Lewis Galantière, was also checked out. Two titles withdrawn in French were Stendhal’s *La Chartreuse de Parme* and Pascal’s *Les Pensées*.

During the late spring of 1938, Cather turned repeatedly to the Library while researching *Sapphira and the Slave Girl*, her twelfth and last novel, which draws

heavily on childhood memories and stories of slavery in pre-Civil War Virginia. In the scholarly edition of the novel, Ann Romines, Professor Emerita of English at The George Washington University, writes of the books Cather checked out while researching the novel. They included *The Life and Letters of John Brown*, edited by F.B. Sanborn; Wilbur Henry Siebert's 1898 edition of *The Underground Railroad from Slavery to Freedom*; and Théophile Conneau's *Captain Canot, or Twenty Years of an African Slaver*. On March 1, 1938, Cather/Lewis also withdrew John Bunyan's *The Holy War*, printed in Glasgow in 1763 (at left). *The*

*Holy War* reappears in the novel when the miller Henry Colbert, unable to help Nancy escape, finds comfort in Bunyan's words. The edition Colbert reads is the same one Cather withdrew from the Library.

The charging cards also reflect Cather's great interest in the theater. As a young woman she had written articles about the theater for newspapers and *McClure's Magazine*. It was an interest she pursued for the rest of her life, borrowing books by Oliver Goldsmith, Henrik Ibsen, George Bernard Shaw, and J.M. Barrie. Cather also followed the career of the young Thornton Wilder, checking out *Our Town*, *The Merchant of Yonkers*, and *The Angel that Troubled the Waters*.

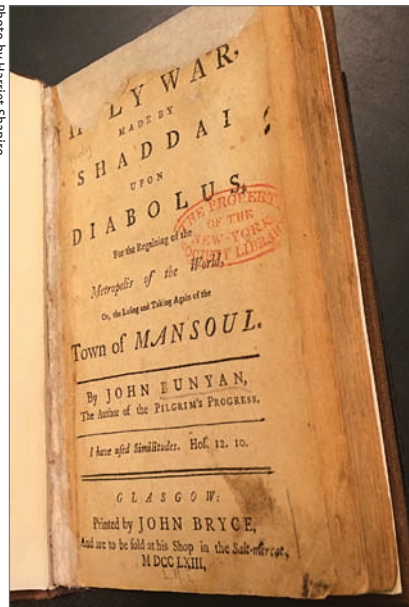


Photo by Harriet Shapiro

For many years Cather had been thinking about writing a novel set in the papal palace in 14-century Avignon, a city, Lewis recalls, “[that] of all French ones she loved the most.” Even as she was completing work on *Sapphira*, Cather turned again to the Library for titles about late-medieval Europe, withdrawing several books about the crusades and histories of England, France and Spain. On April 21, 1941 she checked out Henry Osborn Taylor's *The Medieval Mind: A History of the Development of Thought and Emotion in the Middle Ages*. The titles Cather withdrew stand out like an x-ray of her mind, the skeleton of the book already in place but never completed. During her last years Cather also checked out books she had read before, perhaps, she sensed, for the last time. The titles almost spring off the pages of the final charging cards. On January 24, 1947 she withdrew for the second time Alexander Pushkin's *The Captain's Daughter*. The following month, on February 18, Andre Maurois' *Byron*—Cather had written about him as a girl—was also signed out.

Two months later, on April 24, 1947, Willa Cather died of a cerebral hemorrhage at the apartment she shared with Edith Lewis at 570 Park Avenue. Five weeks later *Byron* was returned to the Library, probably by Edith Lewis.

On March 15, 1953, Lewis wrote to librarian Marion King thanking her for her letter about her recently published memoir *Willa Cather Living*. It was King who had greeted Willa Cather all those years before at University Place. “I can't tell you how your warm, generous praise of the book pleases me,” Lewis writes. “If it seems a true picture to the friends who knew her, that is all I have wished or hoped for...and when you imply that Miss Cather herself would have been pleased with the book, that pleases me more than anything.”

Lewis adds that family illness has left her very much occupied but she hopes to return soon to the Library. In Cather/Lewis tradition, she concludes, “I have a long list of books I want very much to read.”

## A Royal Bequest



Photo by Sam Falk © The New York Times, 1963

The Library gratefully acknowledges an extraordinary bequest from the estate of Shirley Hazzard, who served on our Board of Trustees from 1974 until her death in 2016. She was the author of *The Transit of Venus*, which won the National Book Critics Award in 1980, and *The Great Fire*, winner of the National Book Award for Fiction in 2003, along with several other novels, two books of nonfiction, and many *New Yorker* short stories.

Her will provides for a very generous monetary gift to the Library along with her continuing royalties and those of her late husband Francis Steegmuller. Royalties represent a percentage of a book's sale, or a flat fee per book sold, typically paid by the publisher to the author or to an entity to which the rights have been transferred.

The Library created the Goodhue Society to recognize those, like Shirley Hazzard, who have provided for the Library in their wills or estate plans. Currently, there are 73 Goodhue Society memberships. Each year, we express our gratitude by hosting a special evening in their honor. This year's event is scheduled for Monday, April 16.

If you would like to join the Goodhue Society or learn more about it, please contact Joan Zimmet, Director of Development, at 212.288.6900 x207 or [jjimmet@nysoclib.org](mailto:jjimmet@nysoclib.org).

# Book Recommendations

## Earth Days

The Library hosts *The Art and Activism of the Anthropocene* in cooperation with *Guernica* magazine this April and May. The three-part series brings together writers, journalists, and artists to discuss how they address climate change, and why their work is particularly important in the Anthropocene Era. See [bit.ly/ArtActivismAnthropocene2018](http://bit.ly/ArtActivismAnthropocene2018) for more details. Inspired by this theme, the Library recommends a variety of books on the environment and the natural world.

### *The Death and Life of the Great Lakes*

2017 | Dan Egan | 363.7 E

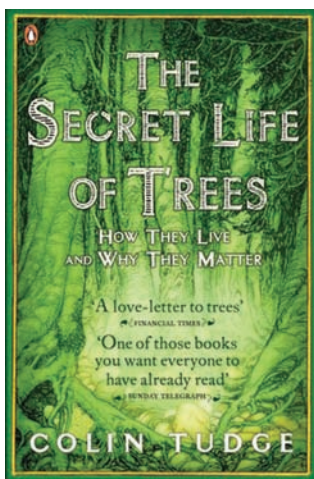
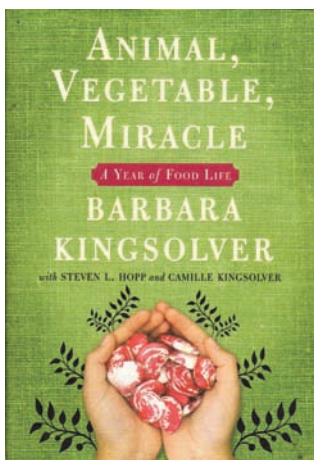
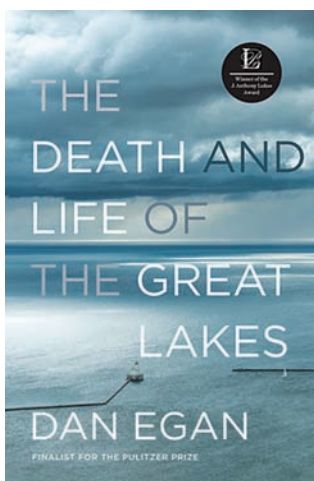
The natural history of the Great Lakes is itself fascinating reading. But the story of the repeated environmental degradation of the Great Lakes and efforts to combat it make for a riveting story in the hands of Dan Egan. On the incredible size and unique configuration of the five lakes, he describes “one giant slow-motion river flowing west-to-east, with each lake dumping like a bucket into the next.” With simple maps and sections showing the varying depths from Lake Superior through Niagara Falls to the St. Lawrence River, he explains how the lakes were beneficially isolated from the oceans and other rivers until men created canals and locks for access of commercial shipping to the lakes. The unexpected consequences of this access, including predatory sea lampreys, invasions of zebra mussels, and toxic algae from agricultural run-off, is described in agonizing detail; but it is heartening to learn of the scientists and citizen activists who fought and still fight to overcome these incursions. The book is compellingly written and even suspenseful—it is still unclear if the good guys can win every battle—and I recommend it wholeheartedly to anyone interested in the future of our planet.

—Jean Parker Phifer, Library Trustee

### *The Secret Life of Trees*

2005 | Colin Tudge | 582 T

In the introduction to *The Secret Life of Trees*, Colin Tudge reveals that his aim is to create connoisseurs of nature—connoisseurs requiring both knowledge and love. What follows could hardly do it better. The book, though quite scientific, is bursting with incredible facts about trees. Did you know that all flowering plants are believed to have one common ancestor? That nature’s desire to cooperate, called



“convergent evolution,” resulted in the variety of plants we see today? That trees aren’t a subgroup of plants?—rather most of the 49 orders of plants contain at least one type of tree, even grasses (it’s bamboo). You’ll learn how mangrove forests survive in salt-water and why koalas have smaller brains. Perhaps most remarkably, you will learn that trees have memories and can analyze problems and find solutions. An astonishing subject revealed by an amazing book.

—Patrick Rayner, Acquisitions Assistant/  
Circulation Assistant

### *Animal, Vegetable, Miracle: a Year of Food Life*

2007 | Barbara Kingsolver | 641 K

“You Can’t Run Away on Harvest Day” is the chapter I remember most from *Animal, Vegetable, Miracle* by Barbara Kingsolver. While it is tempting to dwell on privileges that permit Kingsolver to live a life where she can raise her own animals and plants for food, one must also admire her commitment to doing the harvesting herself. The movement to eat more locally grown food has come a long way since the book’s publication ten years ago, but re-reading the aforementioned chapter still provides renewed inspiration for responsible choices about what we eat, whether vegetarian or omnivore. The great storytelling and engaging voice of one of my favorite authors also make reading about this transformative time of her life a pleasure.

—Cathy McGowan,  
Circulation Librarian/Interlibrary Loan

### *The Gentle Art of Tramping*

1926 | Stephen Graham | 796.51 G

I have admittedly taken some liberties with the call for book recommendations related to environmental topics. But the ecological benefits of tramping (walking, hiking, backpacking, whatever you choose to call it) over other forms of transport in the

Anthropocene are undeniable. So if you have not slowed down enough to enjoy a good stroll lately, I encourage you to pick up this 1926 treasure. Author Stephen Graham begins “know how to tramp and you know how to live,” and you are thus carried forth on a romp offering advice on the proper equipment (some of it dated, though no less enjoyable to read), as well as philosophical ramblings about how to enjoy the tramp itself (“the art of idleness,” “the dip,” “the artist’s notebook,” and the “zigzag walk,” which is just as it sounds). For a more contemporary philosophical and scientific view of the nature and history of trailmaking, I also recommend Robert Moor’s excellent *On Trails: An Exploration* (796.51 M).

—Carolyn Waters, Head Librarian

### *The Peregrine*

1967 | J.A. Baker | 598.2 B

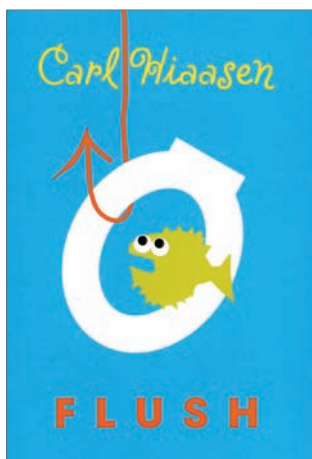
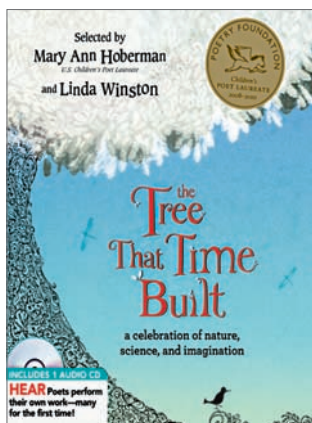
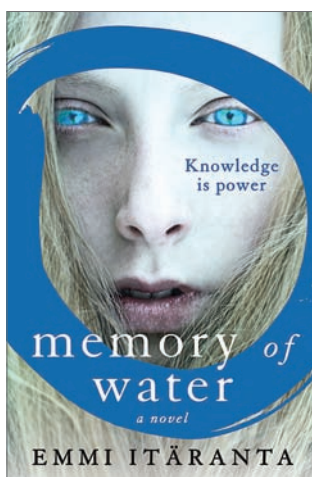
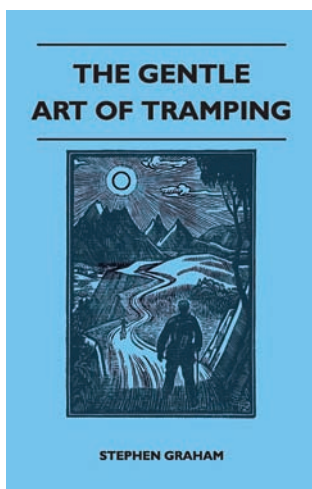
*The Peregrine* is a singular work, uneasy in the company of books solely about the natural world. In diary form, J.A. Baker obsessively tracks and chronicles the hunting rituals of falcons in coastal East Anglia with single-minded immersion that seems to dissipate his sense of human self. Death-haunted, violent, and with a tone of muted melancholy, *The Peregrine* chronicles the desire for personal transformation and resurrection—“the hunter becoming the thing he hunts”—and the annihilation necessary to those ends. “To be out there at the edge of things, to let the human taint wash away as the fox sloughs his smell into the cold unworldliness of water; to return to town a stranger.” Although it was written when falcons were gravely threatened by pesticides and suburban sprawl, and mankind’s destructive force is a specter throughout, this is not a book of shrill protest. Baker’s command of observation and description reads more like a collection of poems.

—Steven McGuirl, Head of Acquisitions

### *Memory of Water*

2014 | Emmi Itäranta | F I

In the time succeeding the Twilight Century—a period of darkness, war, and violent climate change not unlike now—Noria guards the secret knowledge that could save her community. Noria takes on the tradition of Tea Master from her father, with all the living memory and knowledge of water,



despite the threat of the New Qian Military. In constant dialogue between Noria’s present and our historic present, *Memory of Water* discusses important themes of reusable and renewable resources, water restrictions, and knowledge as power. *Memory of Water* illustrates the responsibility each individual has for taking care of our environment, our natural resources, and each other now so that all generations can prosper.

—Ashley-Luisa Santangelo,  
Bibliographic Assistant

## Children’s Library

Every day is Earth Day in the Children’s Library! Here are a few titles from our Go Green list—find it in the Children’s Library, or go paperless and find it on our website.

### *The EARTH Book* | Todd Parr | Juv E P

Colorful, amusing text and illustrations show how children can help protect the Earth.

### *Gone Wild* | David McLimans | Juv 591.5 M

This alphabet book details the habitats of rare creatures and the threats that they face.

### *The Tree that Time Built*

Mary Ann Hoberman & Linda Winston (eds.) | Juv 808.81 T

This poetry anthology celebrates the wonders of the natural world.

### *Me and Marvin Gardens*

Amy Sarig King | Juv-F K

A boy discovers a strange creature in his backyard and must decide how to protect it.

### *The Tree Lady* | Joseph Hopkins | Juv 92 SES

The “tree lady” decided that San Diego needed more trees and transformed it into the green oasis it is today.

### *Flush* | Carl Hiaasen | YA-MS H

Two kids gather evidence that someone is polluting the protected waters around their Florida Keys home.

### *Ship Breaker* | Paolo Bacigalupi | YA-HS B

In a future dystopian realm, a teen boy scavenges for a living, but when he stumbles across an abandoned girl, his plans are disrupted.

## What's New with YA

Susan Vincent Molinaro,  
Children's & YA Librarian



Have you noticed the new addition in a corner of the Library lobby? There's now a section featuring our latest Young Adult High School (YA-HS) titles. Our collection of books for older teens (and adults who like to read YA!) continues to grow. Look for the signature red YA insignia—but also don't forget to head up to Stack 9 where there are *many* more YA reads to check out.

We have also expanded our YA-HS e-book collection in the Cloud Library. Browse this collection to find a variety of series, stand-alone titles, and engaging nonfiction titles. And while we've been busy cultivating the High School section of the YA collection, we are still carefully tending to the original Middle School (YA-MS) branch. You'll find it in the Whitridge Room, just off the Children's Library, with new additions on display on the mantelpiece.

Do tell us what else you'd like to read! If you don't find the title you are seeking in the lobby, our Cloud Library collection, the Whitridge Room, or Stack 9, you are welcome to suggest a purchase.

# Authors Join the Board



We're proud to announce the addition of two new trustees to our Board.

**Dr. Ella M. Foshay** joined the Library in 1998 and has served since 2013 on the New York City Book Awards jury.

With a PhD in art history, she worked for many years at the New-York Historical Society as a curator for paintings and sculpture. Her books include *Reflections of Nature: Flowers in American Art* and *John James Audubon*, among others. Dr. Foshay served as Chair of the Board of the Chapin School from 2002 to 2009, leading the search for a new Head of School, the launch of a new website, a strategic planning process, and a historic capital fund drive.

Bestselling author **Gretchen Rubin** has also been a Library member since 1998. Her books include *The Happiness Project*, *Better Than Before*, and *Happier at Home*, plus the recent *The Four Tendencies: The Indispensable Personality Profiles That Reveal How to Make Your Life Better (and Other People's Lives Better, Too)*. She hosts a top-ranked, award-winning podcast, *Happier with Gretchen Rubin*.

A graduate of Yale and Yale Law School, where she was Editor-in-Chief of the *Yale Law Journal* and winner of the Edgar M. Cullen Prize, Ms. Rubin started her career in law. She was clerking for Justice Sandra Day O'Connor when she realized she really wanted to be a writer. Raised in Kansas City, she lives near the Library with her husband and two daughters.

# A Special Donor Reception

Those who donated \$1,000 or more in 2017 were invited to a special reception in their honor on February 5th. Elizabeth Strout, Pulitzer Prize-winning author of *Olive Kitteridge* and *My Name is Lucy Barton* as well as *Anything is Possible*, *The Burgess Boys*, *Abide with Me*, and *Amy and Isabelle*, shared remarks about her appreciation for the Library.



Top left: Jim Tierney, Elizabeth Strout, and Roger Pasquier. Lower left: Paul Cardin with Claudia Keenan. Above: Chair of the Board Carol Collins Malone, Cary Lichtenberg, and Head Librarian Carolyn Waters.

# New Members Party

Members who joined since the June 2017 New Members Party were welcomed to the Library at a reception on December 4th.



Above: Valerie De La Rosa, Amanda Truong, Andrew Lichtenberg. Upper right: Marilyn and Michael Hodes. Lower right: Norma and Melanie Schofield.



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## One More Picture



Our youngest members enjoy sing-along fun with storyteller Bob “Bobaloo” Basey.