



Books & People

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A Chat with Our Chairs

A transition took place here at the end of last year: Ellen M. Iseman became the new Chair of our Board of Trustees, succeeding Carol Collins Malone after her five years of dedicated service in the role. (Ms. Malone continues to be part of the Board.)

This February, I sat down with our outgoing and incoming Chairs to chat about the Library's many gifts, its future, and, of course, books. —Sara Elliott Holliday



SEH: What originally drew you to the Library? **CCM:** I first joined the Library after receiving a gift subscription from Trustee Emerita Lyn Chase. It was most welcome. I had just returned to New York full-time after an absence of forty years, many of these spent in London and Dublin.

The Library has a long and deep tradition of acquiring the latest books from both sides of the Atlantic, and I was thrilled to discover my favorite authors (and new ones) in the stacks. As a pre-teen I visited the Library with a friend. My lasting memory is the bank of card catalogs in the reference room and the daunting store of knowledge they implied.

As a descendant of the Bowne family, I learned from *City Readers* that my family connection to the Library originates in the 18th century.

EMI: I first visited as a high school student. The librarian at my New York City school suggested this Library as a resource for writing two science papers. So I positioned myself in the stacks, did my research, and was able to hand in the two assignments.

I returned to the Library years later when I became a mother. The children's program on Saturdays was wonderfully dynamic, and I started to come regularly with our young son. We attended children's book readings and then, as I recall, did arts and crafts related to the books just read. On a rainy day, or on any day, the program for young kids was hugely welcome!

Greetings from the Head Librarian

Most days, I sit and work at the Reference Desk for a few hours. I enjoy it immensely, meeting and greeting members, observing the hustle and bustle at the Circulation Desk, honing my reference and research chops, and collecting book recommendations. The Circulation Hall is the beating heart of our building. It's where everyone is greeted warmly by staff, where visitors wait for tours, members check out and return books, and conversation flows in an otherwise silent haven. I was reminded how much our members truly value our society by an email I received not too long ago. Member David Bloom began: *"On Friday, I was a willing participant in a lovely episode of high mutual regard and spirited collaboration,"* describing what I will say is a not-so-uncommon interaction: a member looking for a book for which they knew neither the title or author. But after several probing questions, the determined Circulation staffers managed to extract a clue (*"the author shares a name with a movie star!"*), thereby solving the puzzle. It just so happened that Mr. Bloom was a big fan of the author himself, sparking a lively discussion, and culminating in the two members jointly visiting the stacks to each pick out their own Elizabeth Taylors.

As Mr. Bloom concluded his email: *"And that is my story for the week. It's also a defining example of why NYSL means so much to me—and countless members who cannot help but call the library a second home, a cathedral of reading and writing where a happy ending is the daily norm."*

I love these stories, so keep them coming. I suspect we'll have a run on Elizabeth Taylors now, but not to worry, we have plenty to choose from. Happy reading!

—Carolyn Waters, Head Librarian

I also clearly recall bringing our son to the children's party for the 250th anniversary of the Library. It was an inspired, lively gathering. The event was rich in history about the Library, but also it made me think about what the Library's extraordinary legacy could mean for the future.

SEH: What engages you at the Library these days? **CCM:** First of all, the Library is a refuge from the hurly-burly of city life. The architectural harmony of the interior, the sun-filled reading rooms, and the absence of cell phones feel like a gift. Twenty minutes browsing in the stacks stimulates my imagination. I have made many discoveries. While searching for one novelist, I happened upon the work of Alice Thomas Ellis, who has become a favorite author.

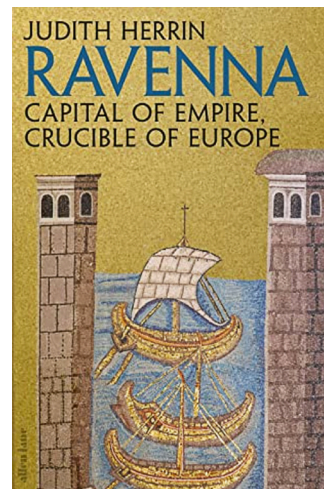
As we ease back into hosting in-person events, I look forward to the evening author lectures in the Members' Room. It is often said that our re-reading as adults of the authors we first met in high school is informed and colored by a lifetime of lived experience. I have experienced that "Aha!" phenomenon by participating in seminars at the Library.

For the past five years as Chair, I have been involved in governance and in working with the staff and trustee committees on a wide range of projects, many of them practical—health and safety, building concerns, employment and financial matters. As a member of the Executive Committee, I will continue to do so, albeit in a different role.

EMI: I've been a Library trustee since 2006 and have served on numerous committees over that period, including most recently the Executive Committee. I'm impressed by how dedicated Library trustees are, how the committees function effectively, and how their members are so committed, too. In tandem, the staff at the Library does an excellent job, most recently in these difficult times during a public health crisis. The Library's membership and the public have been understanding as the Library has needed to pivot in certain ways during the pandemic—for example, to more frequent virtual programming—while still being able to use the Library as fully as possible.

SEH: Could you talk a little about the goals you have in mind for the Library as—fingers crossed—the pandemic draws to a close? **EMI:** I hope that we can expand awareness among Library members and the community about the varied, top-drawer events the Library hosts, as well as about its fascinating and truly worthwhile exhibitions. I also hope we can spread the word even more about the exciting, eclectic Special Collections, as well as our offerings in various book genres, both hard-copy and digital. To me it is amazing how much goes on within the four walls at 53 East 79th Street, including providing space for writers seeking an oasis for their research and work.

CCM: Ellen has delineated several key goals. I would underscore my keen desire to improve the offices for our marvelous, hard-working staff. Another goal would be to bring back the architectural beauty of Library spaces currently off-limits to members and rededicate them to member activities—writing, lectures, classes.



SEH: Now for the fun part: What are you reading lately? **EMI:** I am trying to fill in the many gaps in my knowledge about World War II, reading biographies and histories that deal, for example, with the Resistance in France and the London Blitz. I have also been reading about U.S. presidential politics, and the history that shaped our political parties.

In parallel, I am re-reading certain works of fiction, including novels by Toni Morrison and our former Library trustee Shirley Hazzard. Poetry too: Pablo Neruda's *The Heights of Macchu Picchu*, which I am reading in Spanish to bring my language studies back to life. And Federico García Lorca, victim of the Spanish Civil War—both his verse and his plays.

CCM: As a volunteer tour guide at The Metropolitan Museum, I always have a couple of art history books at my side: currently I am reading Gail Levin's impressive portrait *Edward Hopper: An Intimate Biography*, in tandem with Robert Rosenblum's *Modern Painting and the Northern Romantic Tradition*. As Ellen says, I am trying to fill in gaps. In my case, I am discovering that the Barbarians enjoyed a sophisticated system of political rule and co-operated with the rulers of the West, based on the recently published *Ravenna, Capital of Empire, Crucible of Europe* by Judith Herrin. For whimsical delight, I have discovered *Eulenspiegel*, a satirical humor magazine that allows me to practice my rusty German. The fact that members can access and read for free over 2,000 magazines in many languages on the Library's Libby app is a constant source of amazement. Finally, I have the great pleasure of reading children's books with my family.

SEH: If you were to imagine the Library two decades from now, what would it be like?

CCM: The Library has prevailed through pandemics and international political crises during the course of its 268-year history. Ellen outlines some specific goals for the Library during the coming decades. Like her, I would like to see broader membership from across the City and an extension of our space that would foster collegiality for both staff and members.

Why will a Library such as ours endure? I expect our collection, evening events, and seminars will continue to inform and, one expects, enlighten, members about the most consequential developments on the local, national and international stages. In addition, members will seek to create context, to place the events of 2042 within a framework of ideas. Our wide-ranging collection of more than 300,000 volumes will give subscribers the opportunity to adopt that challenge. The will to understand is enduring.

In addition, and most essentially, I expect that it will be the sheer enjoyment of the written word and the English language itself, with all its idiosyncrasies and variety of expression, that will sustain the Library during the coming decades and beyond.

EMI: I would want the Library to continue to be an attractive resource for children, with the latest electronic offerings and books that could be found. There is nothing like inspiring children to learn to love reading!

I would also wish to make the Library a center for writers of all ages and all interests, with expanded workshops and courses, and enhanced rooms for research and writing. Our book collections should encompass an array of contemporary topics, with the Library providing easy access to them. The Library will draw members from all over town and continue to be known as an evolving and imaginative cultural institution: an iconic place that, like today, supports readers and writers, serves its users professionally, and encourages the pursuit of knowledge and a sense of community through books.

Twenty years from today, let's hope that it will be said that the Library served as a place for contemplation, study and solace as world affairs took an unexpected turn. That has been the case, indeed, over centuries at this cherished institution.



The Library is pleased to introduce Laura Whitman as Goodhue Society Chair.

Laura went from 0 to 60mph as a reader when her family moved to a town with an excellent public library the summer before third grade, beating a sixth-grader for Most Books Read. When she moved to New York City, the first thing she did (after getting her own subscription to the *New Yorker*), was to get a public library card.

Laura studied Art History and East Asian Studies at Williams College and Yale University, leading to a successful career of more than twenty years in the field of Chinese paintings and calligraphy. At Sotheby's she managed auctions in New York and coordinated business in Hong Kong, Singapore, and London. She then moved to rival Christie's, simultaneously teaching a demanding course in the history and connoisseurship of Chinese painting for adult collectors. Laura has also appeared in several seasons of the popular PBS program *Antiques Roadshow*, and has written extensively for art journals and magazines.

She is deeply involved with the American Museum of Natural History, serving as a trustee, acting as liaison to the Jesup Legacy Society, and volunteering in the Research Library. Laura is also a longtime member of the Visiting Committee at the Williams College Museum of Art and enjoys mentoring college students interested in art fields.

Laura is married to art lawyer Thomas Danziger, and they have a college-age son.

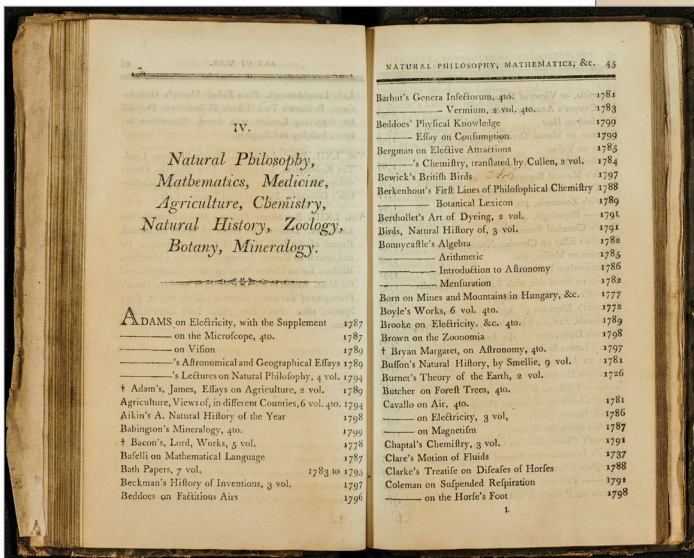
Laura joined The Goodhue Society in 2014. The Goodhue Society is a community of supporters who have included the Library in their will or estate planning. The Annual Goodhue Society reception will be held in the Members' Room on Sunday, April 3. You can learn more about The Goodhue Society by contacting Head of Development James Addona at 212-288-6900 x207 or jaddona@nysoclib.org.

Libraries, Reading Cultural Formation in the E

The New York Society Library is participating in a four-year Arts and Humanities Research Council-funded project which began in October 2019. Based in the History Department at the University of Liverpool in the UK, its primary aim is to investigate the contribution of books to social, cultural, and political change in the eighteenth century. The project will do this by exploring in unprecedented range and depth the role played by voluntary subscription libraries in the reading lives of communities and individuals across the Anglophone Atlantic between 1731 and 1800.

A primary aim of the project is to collect and make available in a single Open Access database the largest collection of contextualized bibliometric data on subscription library holdings, membership and usage ever assembled, derived from catalog and other records for around 80 libraries across the British Isles and North America. The 18th-Century Libraries Online database will allow users to search across all of these records, while also linking specific members with the exact books they borrowed by incorporating all known sets of borrowing records to 1801.

Fellow partner institutions include the Liverpool City Council; the Library Company of Burlington; the Library Company of Philadelphia; the Linen Hall Library; the State Library of New South Wales; the Bristol City Council; the Union Library of Hatborough; the Birmingham & Midland Institute; the American Philosophical Society; the California State University, Long Beach; HeuristNetwork.org; Muhlenberg College; University of Glasgow; University of West Georgia; and Western Sydney University.



A catalogue of the books belonging to the Society of the Norwich Public Library, 1800, Norfolk Record Office, SO/50/1/32



Library and Surgeons Hall, Fifth Avenue, Philadelphia; image from The New York Public Library Digital Collection

Communities and Eighteenth-Century Atlantic


The project will lead exhibitions, talks, and book club discussions with partner libraries that contextualize their institutional histories within the wider framework of local and international library developments in the period.

The project's book club discussions will focus on the volumes that were held in common in the 18th century across the participating libraries and can still be found in our collections. The first two book club sessions featured Hume's *A History of England* and Fielding's *Tom Jones*—the third will be held on March 25 via Zoom and explore Catherine Macaulay's *History of England*. The Library was

also thrilled to host Dr. Sophie L. Jones on March 9 for a talk on the project's findings. Accompanied by treasures from our archives and special collections, Dr. Jones discussed our earliest members with a special focus on Anne Waddell, one of the signers of our original charter.

Be on the lookout for future book club meetings, future news, and events on the Library and project websites, and if you would like to join the March 25 book club discussion, please visit www.nysoclib.org/events for registration information.

An inquiry into the nature and causes of the wealth of nations @ Wigtown Subscription Library vol. 3 | Vans, Alexander (13 Nov 1829) [24 Aug 1799 - - 6 Sep 1799

ID:64184 

 **Type 86: Borrowing**

Identification

Borrower [Vans, Alexander \(13 Nov 1829\)](#)

Holding borrowed [An inquiry into the nature and causes of the wealth of nations @ Wigtown Subscription Library vol. 3](#)

Borrowing information

Date of borrowing 24 Aug 1799

Date or return 6 Sep 1799

Example of a record from the database, showing the loan of Adam Smith's *Wealth of Nations* to a Scottish farmer in 1799; <http://c18librariesonline.org/>



Liverpool Lyceum Building 1828, taken from 'Lancashire Illustrated', p.72, 1832

Libraries participating in the project



Liverpool City Council

Library Company of Burlington



The Library Company OF PHILADELPHIA



THE BIRMINGHAM & MIDLAND INSTITUTE



Arts and Humanities Research Council



UNIVERSITY OF LIVERPOOL

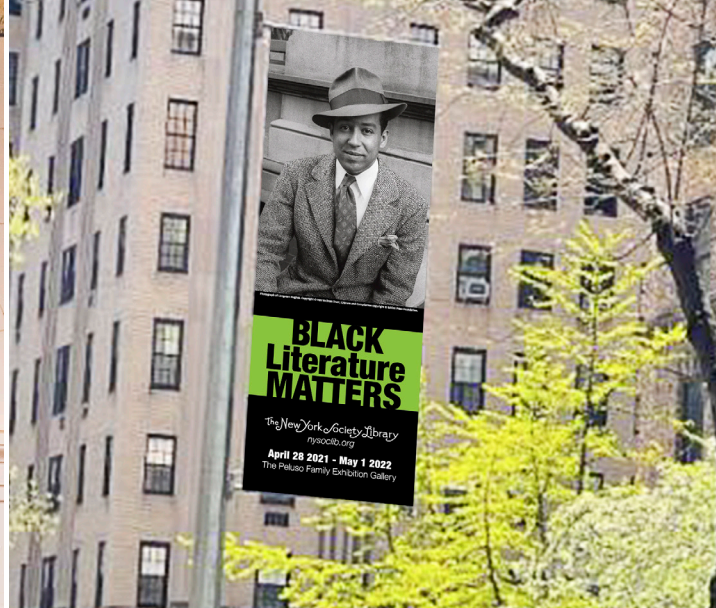
Learn more about the project

Principle Investigator: Professor Mark Towsey, University of Liverpool

Contact: towsey@liverpool.ac.uk

Website: <http://c18librariesonline.org/>

Twitter: @C18thLibraries



Black Literature Matters to Readers Near and Far

The Library is proud of our exhibition *Black Literature Matters*, which opened on April 28, 2021 and will close on May 1 of this year. In addition to members and guests, nonmember visitors have totaled over 500 as of this writing!



Dr. Farah Jasmine Griffin

Alongside the exhibition in the Peluso Family Exhibition Gallery, we were proud to offer four major online events looking at Black literature through history. In addition to the 200+ people who attended their original livestream, the recordings of those events have now been viewed more than 1,200 times.

Those event recordings and supplemental materials can be found on our main Black Literature Matters web hub, nysoclib.org/events/black-literature-matters. Also on that page are substantial lists of recommended reading related to Black history and literature, slavery and freedom, as well as to current events and social commentary.

Black Literature Matters is open to the public in the Peluso Family Exhibition Gallery whenever the Library is open, through May 1, 2022.



Events Here and Online

Varied and fascinating events overcame the start of a season featuring some in-person activities, some online activities, and some scheduled to be in person that then moved online. Watch for recordings of nearly all our Members' Room events on our YouTube channel later this spring.



Shown here: Anna Pitoniak (right) talks about the thriller *Our American Friend* with Jonathan Darman; Kia Corthron (left) speaks with Meg Wolitzer about her novel *Moon and the Mars*; Carl Bernstein (right) discusses his memoir *Chasing History* with his journalist colleague Lance Morrow.



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One More Picture



Three avid readers and frequent visitors to our Young Adult shelves enjoy favorite books in the Whitridge Room.