

FROM THE CHAIRMAN OF THE BOARD

*"Great with child to speak and helpless in my throes,
Biting my truant pen, beating myself for spite:
'Fool,' said my Muse to me, 'look in thy heart, and write!'"*

These favorite lines from Sir Philip Sidney's first sonnet in his *Astrophel and Stella* sequence have often helped me when I am putting pen to paper. I used to have a postcard on my desk at home of a famous painting of St. Jerome in his study, by van Eyck. As I groped for inspiration, I found it comforting to contemplate the picture of the great Biblical scholar and writer of the Vulgate, quill pen at hand as he pored over a large tome from which I imagined he was, as I, gleaning material for his next spurt of writing. The great writer-saint (famous also, as Androcles, for having removed a thorn from the paw of a lion—often depicted in peaceful pose at his feet or under his desk) seemed the embodiment of another couplet from the courteous Sidney's love sonnet: "turning others' leaves, to see if thence would flow / Some fresh and fruitful showers upon my sunburnt brain."

I was touched that William Buckley was reported to have died recently with his boots on, as it were, at what must have been his favorite place, his desk. Maybe Wordsworth sat on a hillside overlooking the River Wye as he penned his lines on Tintern Abbey or thrilled to the daffodils as he (in the words of a favorite parody in *Mad* magazine in the 60's) "wandered lonely as a clod." But most of us scribes need a quiet, comfortable space, either in the company of others doing the same thing or in privacy to confront alone the birth-pangs of the creative process.

The Society Library has been pleased to serve as lying-in hospital to centuries of writers and scholars. But our facilities for both writers and readers are nearly beyond capacity. While we are proud that so many books, articles, plays and poems were ushered into the world within our walls, our space constraints have become urgent. A top priority for the Library is to realize our long-set plans to build out the sixth floor, fill in the lightwell, and expand stack space in the rear yard.

These important goals are well within our reach, as long as our members recognize the need. I am heartened by and very grateful for the generosity of everyone listed on the final pages of this newsletter. Last year we realized a new record for annual giving of \$337,000 and received landmark gifts from the Peluso family and the Marshall Hornblower Trust, among others. Only if we build on the wonderful example set by such generous donors, however, can we continue to provide exemplary services to members, whether they are wrestling with their muses at our writing tables or enjoying our unique collection, online resources, and programs. I like to think that we are on the brink of new successes and that, in a few years, we will look back fondly on the burgeoning opportunities as Shakespeare's Titania recalled doing with the pregnant mother of the changeling boy over whom she fought with Oberon: "we have laughed to see the sails conceive and grow big-bellied with the wanton wind." That may not be the first line that springs to mind when contemplating the fundraising horizons, but for some reason it has always stuck in my head as a delightful image of anticipation, opportunity and joy, and it seems apt enough to conclude my message as the spring arrives. Thank you all for your continued support, and I hope you will help us achieve the anticipated expansion we need and deserve.



St. Jerome in His Study by Jan van Eyck



Charles G. Berry
Chairman of the Board

FROM THE HEAD LIBRARIAN

Every year we field a variety of questions from visitors to the Library—New Yorkers, tourists, and people who happen to walk by and see the awning. Often the first question concerns the slogan on our outside bulletin board: “Free for reference; subscription lending library,” or, in its more common form, “Open to all for reading and reference; circulation by subscription.” Understandably, passersby may wonder just how welcome they are to the building, and some of our members might also appreciate a clarification of this description.

The Library was created as a corporation whose shares were sold. The small number of shareholders were entitled to take out books without charge, as well as to elect the Library’s governing Board. In the early days, the public could use the institution for free (although at the time it was a single room open only four hours a week) and could take out books for a per-volume fee. As the Library’s space, collections, and use exploded during the nineteenth century, this system became unwieldy. Users were redistributed into three categories: an increasingly small, though essential, proportion of shareholders; a large number of members paying an annual fee; and other nonmember patrons.

Today, members who pay an annual or semiannual fee form the majority of our users, but we consider service to our nonmember patrons to be of vital importance as well. Anyone is welcome to enter the building, to sit in the Reference Room on the first floor, and to use our catalog. Nonmembers may fill out call slips to have any number of books within reason brought from the stacks for use in the Reference Room, and they can use the extensive reference collection at hand. Our reference services are available to anyone who walks in, from those with casual questions about the institution to students and scholars investigating our holdings for their projects. At least one longtime Library user prefers the Reference Room as an intellectual home-away-from-home; it is undeniably one of the handsomest rooms in the building.

Membership itself is open to anyone choosing to pay dues and take advantage of the associated privileges; we require no referral or qualifications for most membership categories. For members, of course, the upper floors and stacks are open for browsing, reading, research, and writing, including the opportunity for computer use, particularly on the fifth floor. Members may take out books and attend lectures and other events. Nonmembers are also welcome to attend events as guests of members, and some events are open to the public.

I might also mention another category of nonmember patrons: the scholars and researchers who come from around the world to use our rare books. Rare-book readers, whether local or international, receive special attention from staff and are able to use a reserved space on the otherwise staff-only fourth floor. This use of our collections is a particular point of pride.

Along with the difficulty of summarizing these services in one phrase on a bulletin board, the word “Society” in our name carries an unfortunate implication of exclusion. In the eighteenth century, an organization labeled “Society” meant precisely that it was something open to all, something defined by its availability to everyone throughout society. A former Chairman of the Board, Arnold Whitridge, wrote “The name ‘Society Library’ occasionally creates difficulties today of which the founders never dreamed. It is assumed the the institution was so called because it was meant to be the library of New York Society. Of course in the 18th century ‘society’ was a perfectly straightforward word with no ugly connotation of caste about it. It meant merely a company, a voluntary association of people of similar tastes. It would never have occurred to any of the founders, all of them liberal-minded men, that anyone should be excluded on account of birth.”

In providing services to a diversity of populations, we are living out the ideals of our founders, who wanted to build an institution useful to the whole city, at a time when libraries were not widely available. We are proud to offer our collections and services to members and nonmembers. I look forward to seeing you using your membership opportunities soon. Happy reading—



The share held for some years by Herman Melville

Mark Bartlett
 Mark Bartlett
 Head Librarian

A VISIT WITH IRVING KAHN

Since becoming Head Librarian in 2006, I've talked to Irving Kahn on the telephone several times. Last November, I had the pleasure of meeting him at his apartment near the Library. It was wonderful to discuss so many different things and to hear Mr. Kahn's thoughts about the Library, books, publishing, and more. —Mark Bartlett

“Look ahead and don't be pessimistic” is Irving Kahn's advice for a long life. At age 102, Mr. Kahn is the Library's oldest member, and he continues to keep our Circulation and Acquisition departments on their feet with his lively curiosity and love of learning.

Mr. Kahn has been a member since 1980, when his late wife, Ruth, a great reader whose favorite author was Agatha Christie, introduced him to the Library. Mr. Kahn's own reading tastes lean towards nonfiction, although as a boy he was fond of science fiction and was quite taken by Jules Verne's *Around the World in Eighty Days*. He owns thousands of books, mostly nonfiction, and he emphasizes that they are definitely for reading, not collecting. He is interested solely in a book's content and is much less impressed by the aesthetic or dollar value of a first edition.



Mr. Kahn's daily reading also includes a healthy dose of financial magazines and journals, like the *Financial Times* and the *Economist*. These are crucial to his work as Chairman of Kahn Brothers & Co., Inc., the investment firm he founded with his two sons, in which he is still an active participant. Mr. Kahn is well known and respected for his remarkable career on Wall Street as an American value investor. It began when he worked at Columbia University as a teaching assistant to the legendary Benjamin Graham, several of whose influential books on investing are in the Library's collection. Mr. Kahn prepared statistical material for Graham's landmark *Security Analysis*, and his *Storage and Stability: A Modern Ever-Normal Granary* was reissued in 1998 with a new introduction by Mr. Kahn.

Mr. Kahn is as analytical when it comes to libraries and the future of the book as he is when researching undervalued stocks. While he sees the advantages in online and digital technology, he notes that the ease of digitization has resulted in great quantity and seriously limited quality. He admires Wikipedia “for its good intentions” but is concerned with its gaps in verification. He finds as much ongoing value in his copy of the now classic Eleventh Edition (1910-1911) of the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*. Even though he laments changes in the book industry that place too great an emphasis on “what the masses want” but not necessarily on what is good for readers, he has high praise for the American book publisher Dover Publications. Dover (acquired by the Courier Corporation in 2000) is known for its print reissues of classic and historical books that are in the public domain—as Mr. Kahn notes, these are books “so good that they outlive their copyright.”

Mr. Kahn is pleased that the Library continues to house and purchase such good books and journals and recounts that it has been a great resource over the years for interesting titles. He calls the story of The New York Society Library a unique one, “born as the first library in a British colony called New York, with a bias for very good books out of London for the great benefit of people.”

We are proud that Irving Kahn's own unique story has been a part of ours for almost thirty years.

INTERLIBRARY LOAN: LINKING LIBRARIES

Do you need a book or journal article that the Library does not own? Have you searched the New York Public Library and come up empty-handed? If so, please consider taking advantage of the Library's Interlibrary Loan service.

Interlibrary loan is a concept that began as far back as the seventeenth century, when savvy European librarians realized the necessity of supplementing their own collections through mutual sharing practices. The New York Society Library's own tradition of interlibrary loan dates back to the mid-1800s. Today, interlibrary loan (ILL, for short) provides access to materials from libraries across the country. ILL is transacted only from library to library, so offering this service to our members is essential. Through ILL, the Library not only receives items for its members, but also provides libraries throughout the country with materials from our own collection.

The Library's interlibrary loan service allows members to obtain items that are not available in its collection or from any New York Public Library branch or research library. Books, theses and dissertations, journal articles, and microfilm can all be obtained through interlibrary loan. Most libraries, including ours, will not lend audiovisual, reference, rare, and newly published materials. Items requested from interlibrary loan may take up to three weeks to be dispatched from their home library and arrive here, although often the time is shorter; we do not offer "rush" service.

Although we primarily attempt to borrow from libraries that do not charge for interlibrary loans, some items may not be available without a fee. This depends on the lending library's own ILL policy. If a fee is charged, this fee is passed on to the requesting Library member. Fees are more likely with requests for photocopies, microfilms, dissertations, and hard-to-find materials.

You can request an item on interlibrary loan by filling out an Interlibrary Loan form with as much information as possible. The forms are available at the Circulation Desk and on the Library's website at www.nysoclib.org/ILL.html. The completed form may be returned to the Circulation Desk or faxed to the number below. Members may also e-mail or call in requests to the Interlibrary Loan manager. We ask that members limit themselves to three ILL requests at a time.

When the requested item arrives at the Library, the member is notified, usually by phone. ILL items are held at the Circulation Desk for up to two weeks. Circulation time for each item depends on the lending institution's policies and may vary widely. Material must be returned, or a renewal requested, by the due date, or the lending institution may deny us future loan requests. Renewals can be requested via phone or email to the Interlibrary Loan manager.

The Library is pleased to provide our members access not only to our own collection, but to the collections of libraries throughout the country with this historic service.

Interlibrary Loan Manager Brandi Tambasco can be reached by phone at 212-288-6900 x215, by fax at 212-744-5832, and by e-mail at btambasco@nysoclib.org.

RARE BOOK NEWS: ANOTHER DAY, ANOTHER TREASURE

Among other gifts, our Library recently received a ten-volume uniformly bound set of Jacob Abbot's *Franconia Stories*, printed in the mid-nineteenth century by Harper & Brothers. At first they caught the attention of Rare Books Librarian Arevig Caprielian because of their fine condition and their scarcity in other libraries' holdings—a few institutions have individual volumes, but none the complete set. Then a signature was spotted in volume seven: "Margaret N. Armstrong, Lebanon Springs, 1874." There was much excitement and little hope that the books might have been previously owned by the prominent artist Margaret Neilson Armstrong. Unlikely as this seemed, further research turned up the name of Armstrong's sister Helen Maitland in another volume, the nickname "Meta" in yet another, and, finally, the note "58 W. 10" in volume three. A little more sleuthing proved that the Armstrongs did indeed live at this address. Thus a set valuable in its own right was shown to come to us from the hands of another venerable New Yorker.

Margaret Neilson Armstrong (1867-1944) was an artist and designer influential in New York City art circles, as well as the author of two biographies and several popular mystery novels. Her immortality lies in extraordinary binding designs created primarily for *Scribner's* and *Century* magazines. Some of her bindings can be viewed in our online catalog through a search for her name.

RARE BOOK OUTREACH

By an invitation from Professor Deirdre Stam, Ph.D., Arevig Caprielian taught a class for the "Rare Book and Special Collections Librarianship" course at the Palmer School of Library and Information Science. So engaged were the students that they forfeited their lunch hour to ask questions about rare books cataloging, the NYSL collection, and related topics.



Exhibition Launch, December 2007: top row: trustee Shirley Hazzard and Michael Leahy; exhibition designer John Bernstein and Lorna Livingston, granddaughter of the Library building's architect Goodhue Livingston; Chairman of the Board Charles G. Berry and member Anthony Gronowicz.

RUMOR, GHOST (for the NYSL) by Library member Jane Simon

Is there a complaint if a ghost
chooses a library to haunt?

With permission, I'd grant
the salubrious space and hope

To recoup the favor. What better
edifice than a turn of phrase

nestled in a scintillating sentence
Tickling mind night and day!

Were I a ghost, here I'd haunt
and promise never to harm

a reader; I'd glide the aisles,
Scrawl odd notes, dance through dust-

quarks in stacks, and drench
my spirit in starlight and words.



CONTRIBUTORS TO THIS NEWSLETTER INCLUDED Charles G. Berry, Mark Bartlett, Arevig Caprielian, Sara Elliott Holliday, Patrick Rayner, Jane Simon, Diane Srebnick, Brandi Tambasco, Carolyn Waters, and Joan Zimmet.



CALENDAR OF EVENTS

Registration is required for all events; to reserve spaces, contact the Events Office at 212-288-6900 x230 or events@nysoclib.org. More information on all events, including locations and fees, is available in our Events listing, published separately.

TUESDAY, APRIL 15, 6:30 P.M.

“The Book Is Dead! Long Live the Book!”

Michael Gorman, James G. Neal, and Maggie Jackson

THURSDAY, APRIL 17, 4:00 P.M.

Henry, The Dog With No Tail

Jules and Kate Feiffer

SATURDAY, APRIL 19, 2:00 P.M.

National Library Week Lecture and Reception

Washington Irving: An American Original

Brian Jay Jones

THURSDAY, APRIL 24, 6:30 P.M.

Marie-Thérèse: Child of Terror

Susan Nagel

THURSDAY, MAY 1, 6:30 P.M.

Scottsboro

Ellen Feldman

THURSDAY, MAY 8, 6:00 P.M.

The Young Writers Awards Ceremony

TUESDAY, MAY 13, 7:00 P.M.

Author Series

Einstein: His Life and Universe

Walter Isaacson

WEDNESDAY, MAY 14, 5:30 P.M.

The New York City Book Awards Ceremony

THURSDAY, MAY 15, 6:00 P.M.

The Things That Matter to Us

Patricia Reilly Giff

MONDAY, MAY 19, 6:30 P.M.

New Yorkers and The New Yorker

Mark Singer and Nick Paumgarten

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THE NEW YORK SOCIETY LIBRARY

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