

Books & People

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Harriet Shapiro: Colleague, Inspiration, Friend

The Library is grieved by the death of our longtime Head of Exhibitions, Harriet Shapiro, on July 2, following a stroke. Harriet was a Library member, as child and adult, for over 70 years. She was deeply involved in the life of the Library for decades prior to formally joining the staff in 1997 and being named Head of Exhibitions in 2007. In those roles, she curated, co-curated, or oversaw our beautiful exhibitions and related activities. For each exhibition, this involved generating central ideas, selecting materials and images, working closely with fellow staff and outside organizations to show every element to its best advantage, and writing text for display panels, item labels, and catalogs. Harriet dove deep into everything she did, mining the Library's collection and other resources with intense interest, extensive knowledge and scholarship, and an unmatched eye for detail. These are excerpts from just a few of the remembrances of Harriet that poured in from the Library community this summer. Read the full tribute at nysoclib.org/blog/harriet-shapiro-colleague-inspiration-friend.

Harriet's intellect, generosity, and humor will be dearly missed by all of us who had the good fortune to work with her. Her excitement for exploring the Library stacks was unmatched, and her passion for sharing her discoveries with colleagues, Library members, and visitors from around the world made our corner of the city that much brighter. —**James Addona, Head of Development**

....One memory is a very strong one. We were both so fortunate to work with literary icon and NYSL trustee Shirley Hazzard during the later years of her life. A number of lunch meetings and prearranged visits to Ms. Hazzard's apartment left us both with many great memories of "our time with Shirley." The exhibition and accompanying events were great achievements by the Library. —**Mark Bartlett, Head Librarian 2006-2015**

I associate Harriet with energy. Boundless energy. She was always moving, always on the go, always thinking and planning and happy to chat...because to talk with Harriet was to go on a whirlwind journey where you never knew where you would end up. She was passionate and compassionate, and I miss all the conversations we'd yet to have. —**Barbara Bieck, Special Collections Librarian. Barbara co-curated the 2020 exhibition The Book Beautiful.**

Since Harriet sat at the desk next to mine, I would occasionally be treated to the choicest bits of her current research. "Oh," she'd say, hanging up the phone. "I just learned the most interesting thing about loading procedures for transatlantic trading ships in the

Greetings from the Head Librarian

I think often about the future of libraries, and, of course, our library in particular. So naturally I have been drawn to a spate of recent articles in major newspapers about libraries that are now working to attract and cater to people who are interested in gathering socially but aren't necessarily interested in books. While I'm all for the social activities—our daily teatimes, monthly happy hours, receptions, readings, and small group events fit that bill—the de-emphasis on books is not only depressing but concerning. At the NYSL, our intent is and always has been to build a community of readers and writers; and judging by the numbers of new members who have joined us over the last few years, there are plenty of you who do still read—and believe in the power of books.

Our book collection is at the very heart of everything we do—including those social activities—so it is truly a wistful moment to report that Steve McGuirl, our longtime Head of Acquisitions, has moved on to the next chapter in his life (and literally, out of state). Steve spent the past 22 years building our book collection on its great foundation and we are very grateful for his extraordinary talents. Patrick Rayner and Robert Sanford, who many of you know, and who have worked with Steve for years, will carry us forward. So don't hesitate to reach out to them if you have questions or suggestions for purchase.

What I'm reading now: *Born in Captivity* by Barbara Starke, a title I learned about on the wonderful *NeglectedBooks.com* blog. Check it out!



—Carolyn Waters, Head Librarian



Co-curators Harriet Shapiro and Barbara Bieck with Armstrong family members celebrating the exhibition *The Book Beautiful: Margaret Armstrong & Her Bindings*, January 2020. Photo by Karen Smul.

18th century!" And then it would be interesting! Right up until her death, Harriet's mind was keen, her curiosity endless, and her spirit generous.—**Kirsten Carleton, Assistant Circulation Supervisor**

Harriet thrived behind the scenes and resisted the spotlight, but those of us fortunate enough to work with her will remember her boundless enthusiasm, irrepressible creativity, offbeat New York glamour, and constant kindness. She loved to learn and to teach, to run her latest inspiration by whoever was in earshot, and to take gorgeous photos of the neighborhood, well-dressed acquaintances, and visiting dogs. She was trilingual, articulate, artistic, and slightly nutty in perfect combination. The Library will not be the same without her.—**Sara Holliday, Head of Events**

Since 2008, with the Peluso Gallery in place, Harriet created wondrous, eye-opening exhibitions that expanded and deepened our understanding of the Library's history over the years. Her loss leaves a huge empty place in the Library's family.—**Jenny Lawrence, member of the Lecture & Exhibition Committee**

Harriet's curiosity, devotion, energy, and passion for her beloved Library were a constant presence throughout the many years we worked together. She always liked to show visitors the Children's Library, declaring it the "best place in the building." It is fitting, then, that Harriet's final completed exhibition was the first one inspired by children's literature.—**Randi Levy, Head of the Children's Library**

Harriet personified the personal charm and intellectual force that makes the Library exceptional.—**Carol Collins Malone, Trustee**

Working on projects with Harriet and the trips we took together for exhibitions (Red Cloud, Nebraska for Willa Cather, Seneca Falls and Rochester, New York for The 19th Amendment) were some of the most wonderful experiences I ever had, and I will always be grateful for those times. I know that part of her stays with me, and with all of us.—**Cathy McGowan, former staff member. Cathy collaborated with Harriet on exhibitions 2017-2019.**

...what will probably always come to mind is her excitement as she breathlessly showed off books pulled from our collection for potential display. Each book - even those that didn't make the cut—were like small miracles to Harriet. She once told me she liked to go into our Closed Stacks and listen to the books—strangely, I knew exactly what she meant. Harriet was one-of-a-kind...the type of singular person that one only seems to meet in New York.—**Steve McGuirl, Head of Acquisitions**

I never got a chance to say my last words to you. Sometimes that is the way of the world—a quick exhale that no one is ready for. Some things, as sad as it is,



Harriet Shapiro at the opening of the *Broken Beauty* exhibition, 2016. Photo by Karen Smul.

as bittersweet as life could be, remain unfinished. There never be one last joke or memory, sometimes the now is all that we have. I have too many things to say. The “I love yous” and the secret smiles—you were always one of my favorite people. But, saying adieu and ciao feel like empty words, especially when you are here now with me in another form. Let’s not say goodbye but a “see you someday” In a world of dust-scented books and clementines, Of the memories we shared and those that could have been, over bellyaching laughter, Of inside jokes and open secrets, Sometimes in a different language through stacks and reading spaces —Yes, let’s never say goodbye at all. —**Marialuisa Monda, Events Assistant**

Harriet could be a whirlwind of ideas, notes, images, and energy that at times seemed spiraling out of control but gradually filtered down with exceptional results....I’m also lucky I had the chance to spend time with her outside of work, going to lunch, museums, or just walking around the city talking. She will always be in my heart. —**Doreen Pastore, Communications Designer. Doreen collaborated with Harriet on the design for nine exhibitions.**

Harriet was truly unique and special, like a unicorn....As I write this, I am holding in my lap the exquisite catalogues of most of her exhibitions and marvel at the magic she created. Harriet adored fashion, and we attended every fashion exhibit at the Metropolitan Museum, delighting in every detail! She later created *Fabulous Fashion*, showcasing the Library’s collection of fashion-related books. Harriet herself had her own personal style....She wore her wonderful clothes in a low-key way, so one had to really study them to notice all the details. She was a wonderful friend, and I adored our lunches together. —**Jeannette Watson Sanger, Trustee and Chair of the Lecture & Exhibition Committee**

It’s so hard to put into words how much someone has made an impact on your life. I still expect to see Harriet walk through the front door, glide up the steps (because that is what Harriet did) and greet me at the circulation desk “Hi, Linnea!” and continue into the staff workroom....She loved seeing someone as in love with books as she was. Then Harriet made sure to tell me to bring them to see the exhibit upstairs. “Oh, you must go! It’s called *Quack, Quack!*” And she laughed her fabulous laugh! I will miss that. —**Linnea Holman Savapoulas, Circulation Assistant**

Harriet found the beauty in absolutely everything. If she was excited about a discovery...everyone knew about it. She shared her exuberance for life and learning with us all....Her enthusiasm for the Library, its storied history, and the exhibitions that she developed and created from her deep dives into the stacks were infectious. (And oh! her love of the open stacks! She often led bemused gallery talk visitors on unplanned jaunts through the book stacks, like the pied piper.) I can’t imagine the Library without her. Adieu, Harriet. —**Carolyn Waters, Head Librarian**



Ledger Conservation Continues

Among the treasures in our special collections are institutional archives that reveal the rich cultural and social life of New York City from the Library’s founding in 1754 to the present day. With generous support from the Gladys Kriebel Delmas Foundation, the Library recently began a project that will help make our charging ledgers from 1804-1806 and 1813-1818 more widely available to the public. In their current condition, they can only be viewed under rare circumstances.

The ledgers will be conserved and digitized by the Northeast Document Conservation Center, who treated the Library charging ledgers from 1789-1792 and 1799-1805 before they were transcribed and published on *City Readers*.

The 1804-1806 and 1813-1818 ledgers cover crucial periods in the development of the city and the nation. Previous research suggests that these records will include borrowing information for members of Congress; mayors of New York City; leaders of the Manumission Society, Columbia University, and Trinity Church; and prominent figures such as John Jay, John Jacob Astor, Clement C. Moore, and Daniel D. Tompkins. Study of earlier charging ledgers also revealed that 57 female readers were among our most active members, and we are eager to continue our research into their borrowing history as well.

Thank you again to the Gladys Kriebel Delmas Foundation for their generous support!

Fall Events



Top: Rachel Eliza Griffiths, Margaret Porter Troupe, and Jacqueline Woodson celebrated Ms. Griffiths' novel *Promise*, September 14; Dawn Spaulding read at Live from the Library, October 12; Middle: Ava Chin signed copies of *Mott Street*, September 19; our Celebration of Longtime Members on September 26 included Alison Tung, Roger Pasquier, Helen Whitney, Michael Kowal, and Colin Eisler; Bottom: Janet Wallach spoke to longtime members about her book *Flirting with Danger: The Mysterious Life of Marguerite Harrison, Socialite Spy*, where guests included Jeannette Watson Sanger, Christine Valentine, Lucienne Bloch, and Benita Eisler.



Top: Jane Murphy, far left, spoke with authors and social media experts Mario Askaripour, Claire McKinney, Jessica Lahey, Miral Sattar, and Hannah Orenstein at “Social Media Savvy,” co-sponsored with the Authors Guild, October 18; Middle: Gretchen Rubin discussed her book *Life in Five Senses* with Alexandra Horowitz, October 2; Ruth Chan led a graphic novel workshop for young members, September 27; Bottom: Leah Rubin led a children’s puppet-making workshop inspired by *Quack! Quack!*, October 3.

Remembering Lyn Chase

The Library honors the memory of Lyn Chase, who died at the close of summer. Mrs. Chase became a trustee of this Library in 1996, shifting to Trustee Emerita status in 2012.

Mrs. Chase's Board service included a focus on long-range planning, on efforts to best preserve the print collections, and on our 250th anniversary celebrations. Above all, the Library community benefited from her passion for poetry and the creation of the Ethelyn Chase Fund for Poetry in 2011. This not only supports the ongoing purchase of poetry books, but also underwrote the creation of a special poetry space in the Whitridge Room, where visitors can enjoy Mrs. Chase's remarkable personal collection, including many inscribed first editions.

Mrs. Chase's creative ideas and many connections throughout the literary world enhanced our events calendar as well as our collections. Events organized with her support or at her suggestion involved such distinguished poets and writers on poetry as Miguel Algarín, Toi Derricotte, Jonathan Galassi, Edward Hirsch, Paul Muldoon, Gregory Pardlo, Willie Perdomo, Marie Ponsot, Charlie Smith, Quincy Troupe, and Jenny Xie.

Ms. Chase's gracious and cheerful presence will be missed, but her legacy lives on in our building and our books.



Libraries of the Enlightenment:

Introducing the 'Eighteenth Century Libraries Online' Database

by Dr. Sophie H. Jones

The New York Society Library was founded in 1754 by a small group of public-spirited New Yorkers, who conceived the idea of establishing a library in the city. For the past four years, the Library has been a key partner in a four-year-long project, led by an international team of researchers, which explores the histories of similar community-founded libraries and their reading habits in North America and the British Isles.

Based in the History department at the University of Liverpool and funded by the UK's Arts and Humanities Research Council, the 'Libraries, Reading Communities and Cultural Formation in the Eighteenth-Century Atlantic' project has been investigating the contribution made by books to social, cultural, and political change in the eighteenth century. In unprecedented range and depth, the project explores the role played by voluntary subscription libraries—including the New York Society Library—in the reading lives of communities and individuals across the Anglophone Atlantic between 1731 and 1800.

One of the project's main outputs is the Eighteenth-Century Libraries Online (ECLo) database. This open-access database collects and makes available in one place the largest collection of contextualized bibliometric data on subscription library holdings, membership, and book usage ever assembled. It brings together information from library catalogues and other surviving institutional records from approximately 80 libraries across the British Isles and North America, including the rare surviving borrowing records from the New York Society Library's groundbreaking *City Readers* database (cityreaders.nysoclib.org). When it launches later this year, the ECLo database will allow users to search across all of these records, while also linking specific members with the exact books that they borrowed by incorporating all known sets of borrowing records to 1801. For the first time, users will be able to see how patterns of borrowing in New York, as well as the most popular books which were held at the Library, compared to reading habits at other similar institutions across the United States and beyond.



Archibald Robertson, 'View up Wall Street with City Hall [Federal Hall] and Trinity Church, New York City' (c.1798). City Hall (now Federal Hall) was the eighteenth-century home of the New York Society Library.

Fellow partner institutions on this project include Liverpool City Council; Bristol City Council; the Birmingham & Midland Institute; the Linen Hall Library; the Library Company of Burlington; the Library Company of Philadelphia; the Union Library of Hatborough; and the State Library of New South Wales. These partners are either the surviving individual libraries, or their successor institutions. Since the project began in 2019, it has led exhibitions and talks with partner libraries that contextualize their institutional histories within the wider framework of local and international library developments in the period. As a key partner in this project, the project team have been delighted to be hosted by the New York Society Library several times, including project researcher Dr Sophie Jones, who spoke at the annual donors celebration in March 2022; and in October 2023 the Library's members were given a behind-the-scenes look at the ECLo database. The Library has also hosted lively online 'Book Club' discussions with the project team which explored some of the volumes that were held in common in the eighteenth century across the participating libraries, including Jonathan Carver's *Travels Through the Interior Parts of North America*, Henry Fielding's *Tom Jones*, and Catherine Macaulay's *History of England*. If you missed these events, you can read more about them, including short blogs about each of these books, on the project website.

Be on the lookout for future news and events on the project website: <http://c18librariesonline.org/>.

For more information about the project:
Principal Investigator: Professor Mark Towsey, University of Liverpool, towsey@liverpool.ac.uk
Website: <http://c18librariesonline.org/>
Twitter: [@C18thLibraries](https://twitter.com/C18thLibraries)

Dr. Sophie H. Jones is a postdoctoral research associate at the University of Liverpool, working on the 'Libraries, Reading Communities and Cultural Formation in the Eighteenth-Century Atlantic' project (funded by the UK's Arts and Humanities Research Council), of which the New York Society Library is a key partner institution. Her research focuses on colonial North America, particularly New York.



The
New York
Society
Library

53 East 79th Street
New York, NY 10075

T. 212.288.6900
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One More Picture



Our Director & Head Librarian, Carolyn Waters, joined fellow membership library directors and leaders for an annual Membership Libraries Group meeting in October, hosted this year by the Boston Athenaeum.