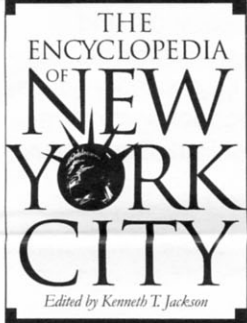




LIBRARY NOTES

THE NEW YORK SOCIETY LIBRARY NEWSLETTER
VOLUME 3, NUMBER 2, JUNE 1996



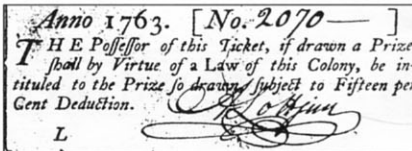
FIRST WINNER OF THE NEW YORK SOCIETY LIBRARY'S ANNUAL NEW YORK CITY BOOK AWARD



On Monday, June 3, at the Library, William J. Dean, chairman of the Library's Board of Trustees, presented the \$2500 award to the editor of *The Encyclopedia of New York City*, Kenneth T. Jackson. "As New York's oldest library and its first public library, we are proud to honor *The Encyclopedia of New York City* with our New York City Book Award," Mr. Dean said. "It is a reference work of range and depth that celebrates the cultural wealth of this great city."

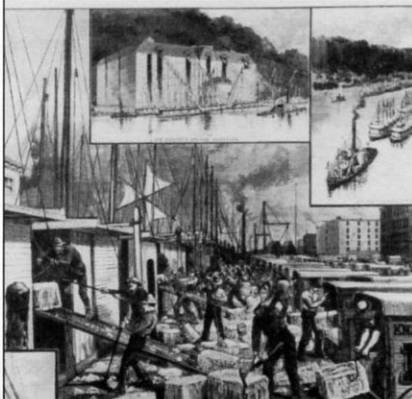
With 680 illustrations and more than 4000 entries by 650 experts, *The Encyclopedia* is a portable archive and portrait of the City in one 1350-page volume. Elihu Rose, chairman of *The Encyclopedia's* advisory committee, said, "In addition to being a superb work of reference, it has a high degree of browsability, and any encyclopedia that has in it an entry for 'alternate-side-of-the-street parking' promises to be a book of compelling interest." Open at random and one finds fascinating information: New York's grid plan was approved by the state legislature in 1811 and the one great change was setting aside Central Park in the 1850s; Ice-harvesting from rivers and lakes was an important part of the City's economy until the 1920s (in 1882 the City's annual consumption was estimated at 1,885,000 tons sold by 1500 icemen in horse-drawn carts); Lotteries were official in 1721; As much as 300,000 tons of iron-ore

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Lottery ticket, 1763

The New-York Historical Society

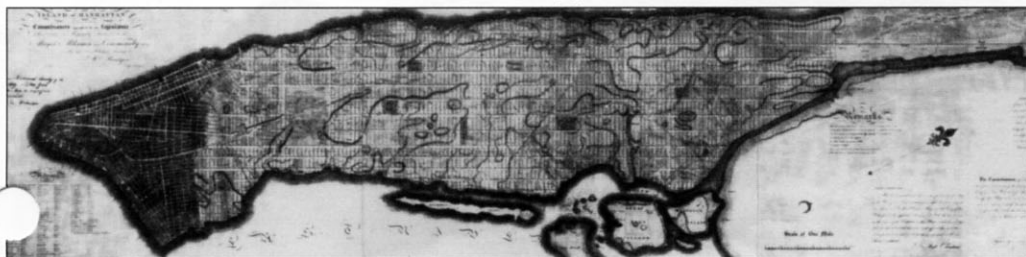


"Ice Industry of New York," Harper's Weekly, 30 August 1884

The New-York Historical Society



Miners on Staten Island, 1890 Staten Island Historical Society



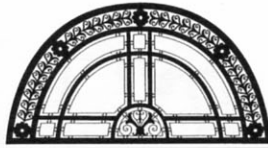
Commissioners' map of New York City, 1811

The New-York Historical Society

Editor Kenneth T. Jackson, the Jacques Barzun Professor of History and the Social Sciences and chairman of the history department at Columbia University, devoted much time to the project over the last eight years. Among the problems he ran into along the way was having to leave out whole topics. "We didn't put in novels or TV series or movies that focused on New York--it would have been a bottomless pit."

Another major issue was deciding who was a New Yorker and who was not. Woody Allen, Arthur Miller, Leontyne Price, and Leona Helmsley are among the 153 entries of living New Yorkers. Then there were experts who couldn't agree, particularly on the water system and Central Park. "And the most difficult problem overall was having to make the articles shorter and cut things we didn't want to cut."

Originally from Memphis, Dr. Jackson has adopted the City, which he calls "a powerful engine of creativity and commerce and human interaction that is essential to America." He is working on a CD-ROM version and a second edition, planned for early in the next century. "Send me your revisions," Dr. Jackson urges.



Chairman of the advisory board Elihu Rose discusses The Encyclopedia's special features as Encyclopedia editor Kenneth Jackson and The New York Society Library's Board Chairman William Dean look on.

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was mined out of deposits on Staten Island, and granite-like rock, quarried there between 1841 and 1896, paved the streets of Charleston, South Carolina.

The six members of the book award selection committee were: Jacques Barzun, cultural historian, critic, and author of more than 40 books; Joan K. Davidson, civic leader and past commissioner of New York State Parks, Recreation, and Historic Preservation; Christopher Gray, architectural historian and writer for *The New York Times*; Alfred Kazin, critic, educator, and author; Elizabeth Barlow Rogers, former administrator of Central Park and president of the Central Park Conservancy and, presently, executive director of Cityscape Institute; and the Pulitzer Prize winning playwright Wendy Wasserstein.

The selection committee stated, "The probability is that we shall never again have the opportunity to signalize to the reading public a work containing so much that is new, varied, often picturesque, and authoritative."

CONVERSATIONS ON GREAT BOOKS

Virgil served as Dante's guide; our guide through *The Divine Comedy* in the first of the Library's "Conversations on Great Books" was Professor Joseph Anthony Mazzeo of Columbia University. O Magnanimous and learned guide!

Dante assumes immense learning on the part of his reader. He makes hundreds of references to Greek and Roman history, mythology, theological issues, and contemporary events. Commentaries on *The Divine Comedy* began soon after Dante's death in 1321. The first may have been written by Dante's son Pietro. Already by 1481, the date of possibly the earliest printed edition (which the participants viewed at the Pierpont Morgan Library), the commentary exceeds the length of the poem.

Dante's wonderful similies are drawn from everyday life: The perilous sea, flowers, a flock of sheep, children who are afraid, an uprooted oak. One of my favorites is when Virgil transforms the dispirited Dante with the news that Beatrice has sent him to be his guide. "As little flowers, bent down and closed with the chill of night, when the sun brightens them stand all open on their stems, such I became with my failing strength, and so much good courage ran into my heart that I began as one set free...."

The Divine Comedy is the most challenging book I have ever encountered. In the years ahead, I hope to return to favorite cantos and become acquainted with new ones. Reading *The Divine Comedy*, I now realize, is a lifetime undertaking! --William J. Dean, Chairman of the Board of Trustees

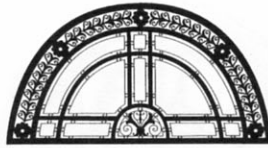


The second of the Library's "Conversations" was devoted to the *Essays* of Michel de Montaigne. In 1571, at a time when France was convulsed by religious civil war, the 38-year-old Montaigne returned to the family chateau at Montaigne, amid the vine-covered hills of Bordeaux, abandoning without regret the life of Paris and of the provincial law courts. His stated purpose, he wrote at the time, with characteristic diffidence, in words he caused to be painted over the mantel in his library, was to consecrate "what little remains of his life...to freedom, tranquillity, and leisure." He soon recognized, however, that the "soul that has no fixed goal loses itself," and resolved to record his thoughts so that he might "contemplate their ineptitude and strangeness." This was the inauspicious beginning of a project that was to occupy him for the rest of his life, and would become one of the great works of world literature.

The "Conversations" were led by Jacques Barzun, who is singularly well-equipped for the task not only by a lifetime of reflection on the *Essays*, but by the learned, skeptical, and humane temper he shares with Montaigne. The group explored Montaigne's inconsistencies ("like a sure-footed Basque," Sainte-Beuve noted, "he jumps from rock to rock")



and digressions through the stoicism of the early essays and the profound skepticism about human reason in the *Apology for Raymond Sebond*. The final session was devoted to the magnificent essays that came with Montaigne's neo-epicurean recognition that "there is no knowledge so difficult as to know how to live this life well" and that "the most savage of our maladies is to despise our own being." --Peter Dailey, Library member



THE WALLET

Barbara H. Stanton, Development Committee Chair

This next year, like the last several ones, will be a time of intense behind-the-scenes activity as the staff prepares for the automated circulation made possible by the successful completion of the recent three-year Capital Campaign. Contrary to some appearances, such activity is not new to the Library. Sixty years ago was a time of even greater change. In the spring of 1936, the trustees purchased the present building, which officially opened to



109 University Place

the public fifteen months later, on July 1, 1937. In the intervening time, the building was remodeled to make it suitable for library use, and the collection was moved from 109 University Place.

The new building was the former residence of Mrs. John Shillito Rogers and built in 1917 to designs by Trowbridge and Livingston--already architects of B. Altman and Company (1906, extended 1914). It is intriguing to think that these two structures--built for very different purposes--would come to house libraries: ours, and, in the former Altman's this year, the Science, Industry, and Business Library (SIBL) of the New York Public Library. The 1936 purchase price for our building was \$175,000, and the Board then contracted for about \$108,000 of alterations, principally for putting in stacks--in the midst of the Depression, no mean sums.

These outlays were made possible through the February, 1917 bequest of Sarah C. Goodhue of 189 Madison Avenue (her house must have stood just across Madison Avenue from the then new Altman's). In her will, Mrs. Goodhue made the Library her residuary legatee, "desiring that a portion of this gift, not exceeding, however, the sum of \$600,000, shall be expended....for the purchase of real property in the said Borough of Manhattan, and the erection thereon of a building designed and equipped for a new library building...."

The move of 60 years ago involved vacuum cleaning, boxing, and moving every book--which puts our current modernization into proportion. However, as before, the burden of change has fallen particularly heavily on the staff. All hail to Heidi Hass, head of the Cataloging Department, and her colleagues, who received a much-deserved award at the Annual Meeting for inventorying and bar-coding the collection preparatory to retrospective conversion! And also hail to Mrs. Goodhue and to others--including many present readers--whose foresighted gifts have allowed this Library to thrive.



53 East 79th Street



Bookmobile

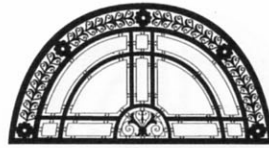
BOOKS ON WHEELS

As a convenience to members, the Library is considering a book delivery and pick-up service by bicycle messenger in parts of Manhattan starting this fall. This messenger service would be available two or more days each week at a modest fee--probably no more than \$1.50--for each trip. There would be a limit on the number of volumes that could be picked up or delivered at one time. Members interested in the service, either regularly or occasionally, would leave a deposit and would notify the Library in advance of each trip desired.

The decision to offer this service, and if so, where, how often, and at what fee will depend on member interest. If you feel you might like this option in the future, please **call Nancy McCartney at (212) 717-0357.**

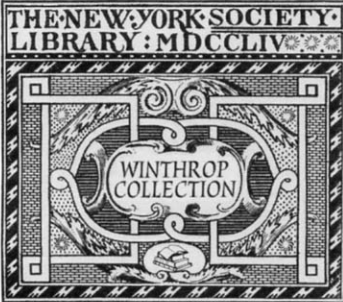


The Library will be closed every Saturday from June 29 through August 31. Between these dates the Library will be open Mondays at 9:00 A.M. (instead of the usual 1:00 P.M.). Saturday hours resume on September 7. We will observe July 4th and Labor Day, September 2. Call (212) 288-6900 for more information about the Library. Please send comments, suggestions, and letters concerning *Library Notes* to Jenny Lawrence, editor, at the Library.



THE WINTHROP COLLECTION

Margaret M. Byard



In 1812, the New York Society Library acquired 269 volumes of the library of John Winthrop (1606-1676). Even in brief summary, Winthrop's life is a subject of wonder. Arriving in the colonies in 1631 (a year after his father, John Winthrop the Elder, the famous governor of Massachusetts), Winthrop became founder and governor of Connecticut. Among his many accomplishments was his realization that industry was essential to economic growth, which spurred his efforts to move the colony's

focus beyond agriculture. He also took time to study science as well as alchemy and became a well-known physician. "Wherever he came," the Massachusetts Puritan Cotton Mather wrote, "the Diseased flocked about him, as if the Healing Angel of Bethesda had appeared in the place." As the Royal Society's first representative in the colonies, Winthrop corresponded with Newton, Boyle, and others--and imported the first telescope to the colonies, reporting to the Society on a fifth satellite of Jupiter.

Winthrop was a passionate book collector, and his original library contained more than 1000 volumes, reflecting the many facets of his life and interests. In the Library's collection are 135 scientific books on alchemy, physics, chemistry, and medicine. There are remarkable books on the early period of astronomy: two books by Tycho Brahe (who shares the honor with Kepler as the greatest astronomer before Galileo); Robert Fludd's *Utriusque Cosmi majoris scilicet atque minoris metaphysica* (1617) (an imaginative, mystical conception of the universe); and Kepler's *De Nova Stella in pede Serpentarius* (on the famous new star of 1606, a bestseller of the time that opened the way for Galileo's discoveries). Winthrop also was very proud of three books that had belonged to John Dee (1527-1608), the "celebrated philosopher and chimist," who had a library of over 3000 books which he used for his own studies and for lending to contemporary navigators, explorers, scientists, and students in many fields. Two of the books from Dee's library are by the sixteenth-century Swiss physician and alchemist Theophrastus Paracelsus--one on health baths and one on weather, while the third is an account of Euclid's principles, edited and introduced by Dee.

The collection is a rich resource, especially to a scholar of American colonial history, especially with a knowledge of German and Latin. The study of Winthrop's books can add significantly to the portrait of a versatile genius, an American man of the Renaissance, whose influence reached far beyond the New England colonies.

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JOHN WINTHROP.



Health bathing in practice, an illustration from Theophrastus Paracelsus's *Water Baths*, 1562 (Dutch). Notice the communal activities--sponge throwing and backrubbing.

THE NEW YORK SOCIETY LIBRARY

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