



LIBRARY NOTES

THE NEW YORK SOCIETY LIBRARY NEWSLETTER
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FROM A TWENTY-SEVEN-YEAR PERSPECTIVE

By Jacques Barzun

Widely known as a scholar, teacher, and author specializing in the cultural history of the modern period, Barzun has had a distinguished career at Columbia University. He is former president of the National Institute of Arts and Letters and a recipient of the French Legion of Honor. Internationally acclaimed for his works of biography, history, and criticism, Barzun has written more than forty books. The following is abridged from his remarks at the Annual Meeting, April 25, upon being presented with an award from the Library for his 27 years as a trustee.

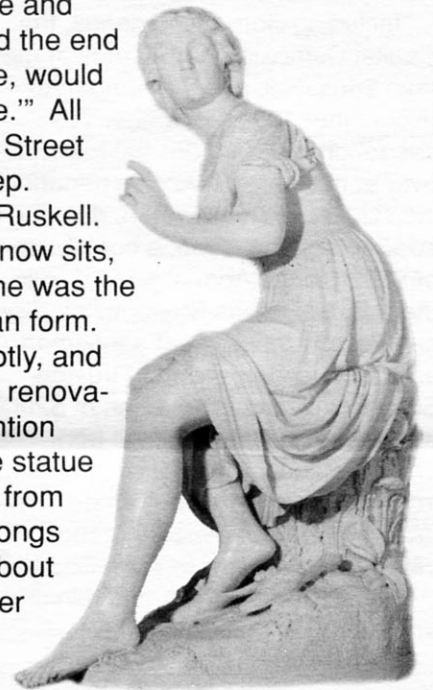
I am deeply touched and thank the Board of Trustees--especially Shirley Hazzard--for their generous opinion, which has led to this award. My time on the Board falls into two sharply contrasting periods. When I first joined, the chairman was Mr. Arnold Whitridge, the grandson of Matthew Arnold. He was a polished gentleman with a classical English education, who taught at Columbia. He was thus a colleague of mine, but I saw him there only casually. It was here I got to know him. His policy was Peace and Quiet, and his method was suavity. So smooth was the chairman that toward the end of his tenure, he would make all motions himself and after the briefest pause, would say: "I'm sure we're all agreed about this. Please put down 'Unanimous Vote.'" All this lent a dreamy quality to the meetings, so that when one got out on 79th Street afterwards, one felt like someone who has just waked from a refreshing sleep.

Fortunately for the subscribers, there was, outside the boardroom, Miss Ruskell. She was an impressive personality. From her desk, the one where Mr. Piel now sits, she managed the staff and the subscribers without seeming managerial. She was the embodiment of outreach before the word was invented, the Internet in human form.

All this atmosphere of deep calm and family values changed rather abruptly, and the Board found itself going from one excitement to another. First came the renovation of the whole building, which involved many grave decisions. I shall mention one to give you an idea of our intent deliberations. It was whether to put the statue of the graceful girl at the turn of the main stairs. Her left foot projects a little from the base, and some were afraid that her toes would be broken off by the throngs marching up and down. Next came the great crisis, the vehement debate about facing the 21st century. Were we prepared? A consultant told us that all other libraries were arming themselves. We asked how. By computerizing, of course--simple but very expensive.

But the resisters believed there was no rush, the 21st century was likely to approach one year at a time. A satisfactory compromise was reached, and steps were taken to provide the staff immediately with the electronic help that would facilitate their work. From this high point, excitement gradually abated.

The new calm differs from the old as the present chairman's smooth handling differs from the earlier one. Bill Dean's is ensured by his orderly mind, his quick wit, and tactfulness. Another source of comfort is Mr. Piel, a remarkable librarian who loves and reads books. Equally gratifying is what you heard from our vigilant treasurer: our bottom line is free of those irritating parentheses that indicate a deficit. With all these attractive characteristics of our present state, you will not be surprised to hear that I am ready to serve another twenty-five or thirty years.





THE WALLET

By Barbara H. Stanton
Development Committee Chair

"An Evening with James Boswell" on May 11th combined scholarship with performing artistry. The sold-out event made over \$30,000, thanks to the generosity of Richard Goodyear, the author; Sam Waterston, as Boswell; and Dick Cavett, the introducer, who donated their considerable talents and time. The Boswell Committee apologizes to members and friends who could not be accommodated that night. We did not know what the response might be to this first benefit in the Library's history. We kept our expectations low--and were swamped by ticket requests. Next time we will know better.

Including Boswell proceeds, the Capital Campaign now stands at more than \$685,000, and the Annual Appeal (November 1994-November 1995) has reached \$108,555--the highest ever at this date. Two gifts honoring individual Library members deserve special mention. One, a contribution of \$1000 to the Annual Appeal, is in memory of Francis Steegmuller, distinguished author, great gentleman, and deceased husband of trustee Shirley Hazzard. The other, of \$2000 to the Capital Campaign, is from Train, Smith Counsel, New York City, in honor of C. Sims Farr, an eminent lawyer, staunch advocate of the Library, and advisor to Train Smith. We thank these donors and join them in celebrating their honorees.

The Capital Campaign now has raised enough money to undertake the major expenditures necessary to put the Library's shelf list in computer-readable form ("retrospective conversion") and to automate our book acquisition and circulation systems. The senior staff, led by Heidi Hass, head of the Cataloging Department, has been researching these matters for several years and has selected the systems and vendors most appropriate to this Library's size, collection,



Sam Waterston receiving the Library's prestigious MBE award (Master of the Boswell Evening). From left: Henry S.F. Cooper, Jr., William J. Dean, Barbara H. Stanton, and Sam Waterston.

and way of operating. The Board has authorized the expenditures, and the first contracts will be signed shortly. Retrospective conversion will take about a year, and acquisition and circulation automation cannot begin until after that--but this is the beginning. Non-computer-literate members can rest assured that the present card catalog will remain in place even after computerized access to our collection becomes possible.

The hole in the ceiling of the second floor stair landing is evidence of another work in progress. We are remaking this landing into an Exhibition Space, thanks to a \$15,000 grant from The Thomas J. Watson Foundation

Finally, the stack elevator will be modernized this summer! Amending its present unheeding course, the elevator soon will stop for all calls in the direction of its route. This much-desired and long-awaited improvement will be funded jointly from the Annual Appeal and the Capital Campaign.

Thanks to all of you who have helped make these improvements possible. As before, contributors will be listed in full in the next *Annual Report*.

TO LIBRARY MEMBERS

By William J. Dean
Chairman, Board of Trustees

The founding of The New York Society Library was an outgrowth of a desire for civic improvement; in the words of a founder, to promote "a spirit of inquiry among the people."

On April 8, 1754, an article appearing in *The New-York Mercury* referred to "A Subscription...now on Foot, and carried on with great Spirit, in order to raise Money for erecting and maintaining a publick Library in this City....We make no doubt but a Scheme of this Nature, so well calculated for promoting Literature, will meet with due Encouragement from all who wish the happiness of the rising Generation."

The Library's governing articles state that "a Publick Library would be very useful, as well as ornamental to this City & may be also advantageous to our intended College," referring to King's College, now Columbia, founded the same year as the Library. Faculty and students from the college made use of the Library in its first home: a room in the Old City Hall on Wall Street facing Broad Street.

Members may wish to consult the *History of The New York Society Library* (1908) by Austin Baxter Keep, from which these notes are drawn.



APPEAL TO LIBRARY MEMBERS

Do you have any Library mementos in your home? We are looking for such material as Library bookbags, Library pamphlets, or any other physical objects from the past that we could use to enliven the upcoming exhibition of the history of The New York Society Library. Please call (212) 288-6703

LETTER

Dear Mr. Piel,

What a boon the Library has been. I first used the Library in 1971 to help in cataloging a collection of Riche family papers of the 17th century (mostly on the explorations and colonization of Bermuda). The Library had the Public Records Office papers which were of great help, as well as older books of U.S. history to help in identifying persons and places. Justin Winsor's books come to mind. Many of these have become scarce for having been used to pulp in the larger libraries.

About five years ago, I was looking up Jefferson's letters to one of the promoters of lithographers in France--Lasteyrie--discovering that he had been made a member of the American Philosophy Society. I found their proceedings at the Library. A couple of months later, I had copies of all the letters from the various libraries.

Just a year ago, I was checking on Sarah Bernhardt and the Paris of her time. For my own project (a list of French book sale catalogs), I have been pulling out significant happenings in Paris which might have affected the auctions-- not only revolutions but also floods, cold snaps, plagues, and such. To those who have not done precise work of this kind, it seems easy enough: "There must be something already written." Alas, it is not the case. The wonderful collection of memoirs in the New York Society Library is a great help.

For one who might wish to get a handle on what was really going on politically in Paris from the turn of the century to 1940, for example, Richard Hale's *Democratic France* is an excellent book. Hale knew many of the politicians and was aware of the rivalries. It is much like trying to explain to a foreigner just why the head of the Appropriations Committee is among the top five most powerful positions in U.S. politics.

The quick access to the shelves saves having to request three or four dozen books just to have a look. The 42nd Street Library (my alma mater) has become mired in technology and the too many demands of academics and their term-paper-producing students. One might almost say, it attempts to have too much information and ends by losing the pertinent information.

Gabriel Austin

Bibliophile and book appraiser

WHAT IS RETROSPECTIVE CONVERSION ...OR....WHY ARE THE STACKS CLOSED?

By Heidi Hass

Head of the Cataloging Department

The Library is undertaking an inventory and bar-coding project both to verify our understanding of what the Library owns and to lay the foundation for a computerized circulation and reserve system. In our history, we have never conducted a complete inventory of the collection. The result will be a more accurate card catalog and less member and staff time spent searching for books that no longer remain in the collection. Mr. Piel will review the missing books to determine if any should be reordered.

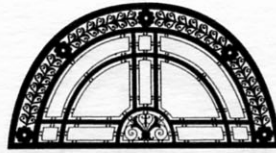
As we match our shelf list (the Library's record of what it owns) to the books on the shelves, we are applying bar-code stickers to shelf list cards and books. The bar code contains a number that will identify each individual book in a computer system. Once this process is complete, we will send our shelf list to a vendor, who will convert our paper-based records into machine (computer) readable form.

After computerization, we will be able to: determine which books members have checked out, and their due dates; conduct sophisticated computer searching of the Library's holdings; and discover whether books have been ordered by the Library. The staff will also be relieved of much clerical drudgery, such as mailing overdue postcards and renewal notices, tasks that are ideally suited to computers. The automation of these and similar tasks should enable the staff to spend more time assisting members, and on upgrading and maintaining our collection. So, while the staff regrets the temporary inconvenience of stack closures, we are certain that the members will agree that in the long run our Library will be improved.

THE ANNUAL MEETING

At the Annual Meeting on April 25, Margaret Cook, William J. Dean, Isabel Eberstadt, Barbara Goldsmith, Shirley Hazzard, Jean Parker Phifer, and Barbara H. Stanton were reelected trustees, and Theodore C. Rogers, industrialist and financier with a strong commitment to literature, was elected a new trustee.

Rita Atterton was presented with a certificate of appreciation for her knowledgeable and understanding service since 1968. William J. Dean then read a citation to Jacques Barzun. At the conclusion of Professor Barzun's remarks, the meeting adjourned.



REPORT FROM THE VISITORS

More than five years ago, trustee Margaret Mather Byard organized the Visitors' Committee, consisting of Library members who volunteer to report on the collection from their particular knowledge and expertise. Twenty-one visitors' reports are now available in a folder behind the librarian's desk. The following is an excerpt from a report on City politics and history by Jules Cohn, professor of politics at CUNY.

The Library's collection of materials about New York City's politics includes some rare documents useful to specialists and assorted holdings that are standouts for other reasons. Among these are books that signify changes in attitudes about civic life in the long course of the Library's history.

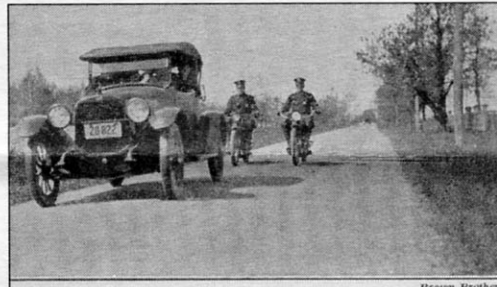
The patrician bias of leading New Yorkers, revealing what is nowadays called the hegemony of the elites, is reflected through the *Minutes* of the Common Council, 1784-1831. Here are on-the-record remarks by government officials about the shiftless classes. In the *Official Documents* of Mayor George Opdyke, published a few decades later (1862-1864), one can become acquainted with the mayor who defended the haberdashery of the city's gentry. Opdyke went to the mat for the principles of New York gentlemen during the Draft Riots, when he ordered the police to defend Brooks Brothers (then located at Catherine and Cherry streets and under siege by rioters) and search the slums for stolen suits, socks, and ties

Comments and letters to Jenny Lawrence, editor of *Library Notes*.

bearing the sign of the celebrated Golden Fleece.

The somewhat more enlightened attitudes of the "good government" movement of the 1920s-1940s and the enthusiasms and indignations of generations of reformers and muckrakers are well represented.

But my favorite of all the books in the Library's collection is a slim volume entitled *Our City-New York*. It was



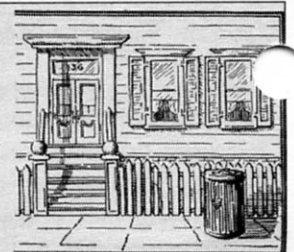
Brown Brothers
THE WATCHFUL POLICE ON THE LOOKOUT FOR SPEEDERS.

published in 1924 "by the High School Students of the City" and exemplifies the pride that New Yorkers once invested in our public institutions. A text brim-full with conviction

and faith explains how democratic government works and stresses the reciprocal responsibilities of citizens and leaders. Simple and straightforward photographs of graffiti-free schools, bridges, and parks are included. And space is provided for proud renderings of New York's fire prevention equipment and police stations, a page from the annual property tax rolls, and a stately garbage can.



THE WRONG KIND OF ASH CAN.



THE RIGHT KIND OF ASH CAN.

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