

Lecture Room
New York Society Library.
Engagements 1844.

The
New York
Society
Library

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Books & People

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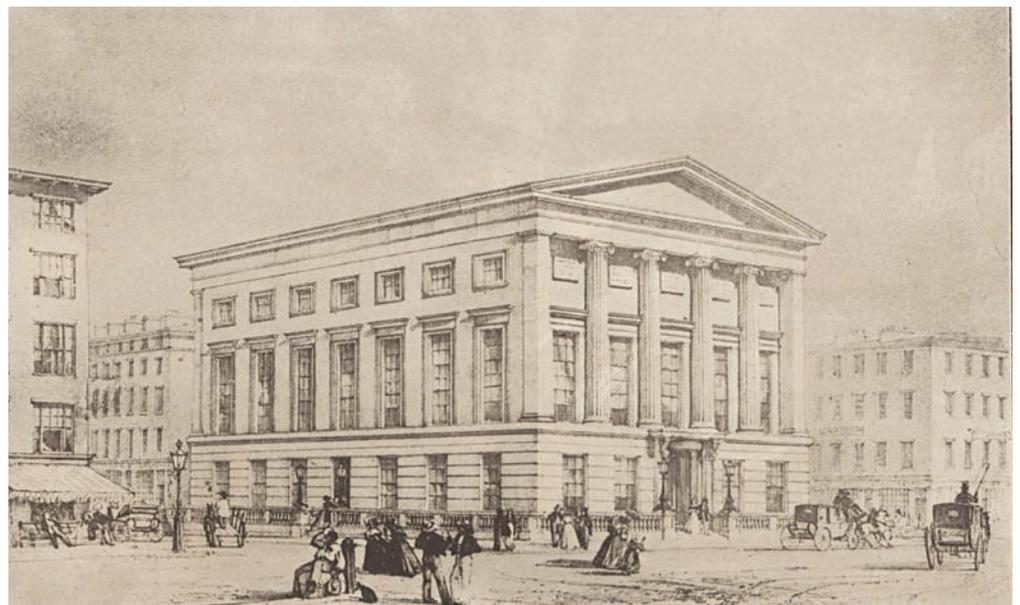
Members Speak

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The Accidental Venue: Live at the Library 1841-1853

by Sara Holliday, Events Coordinator

In 1840 the New York Society Library relocated to a grand purpose-built brownstone on Broadway at Leonard Street in the neighborhood now called Tribeca. A partnership with the nascent New York Athenaeum motivated the move. Founded as the Library's rival, the Athenaeum planned social-club aspects, a scientific laboratory, and a lecture series in addition to books. However, it soon ran into financial difficulty, and in 1839 the two institutions consolidated, leaving the Library with a building designed to hold both its collections and patrons and the Athenaeum's multifarious activities. Among our inheritance: a state-of-the-art auditorium seating several hundred.



Broadway and Leonard was a cultural crossroads, a mere stroll from the lively Broadway Tabernacle, the Astor Place Opera House, and P.T. Barnum's American Museum. It wasn't long before the Library put that spare space to work, renting the auditorium by the day to anyone with fifteen dollars and something to show. As our history *The New York Society Library: 250 Years* puts it, "the Library found itself, unwillingly, in the entertainment business."

Greetings from the Head Librarian

Fall is the season most of us head back to work and school refreshed and ready to tackle projects after a summer of leisure – hopefully one filled with good reads from our stacks!

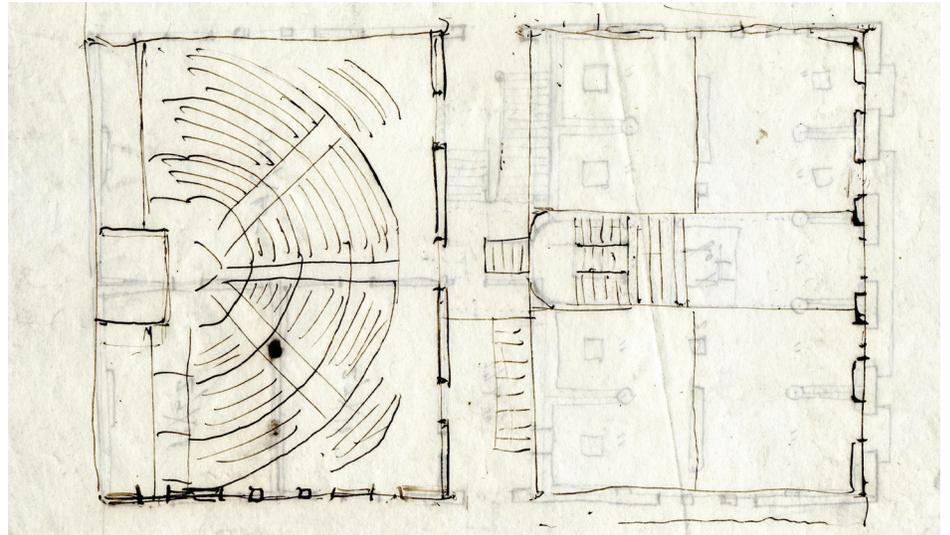
Here at the Library, though, we were busy all summer long with some very important activities. We installed a beautiful new handrail along our main stairwell from the first floor to the Peluso Family Exhibition Gallery. We developed an extensive membership survey to learn about how the Library fits into your life (see related article, page 5). And we completed a long-overdue refurbishment of the Members' Room.

Our talented designer, Susannah Talley, updated and brightened the room while retaining its classic look and feel. She had all of the chairs as well as the sofa reupholstered, added portrait lights to gently illuminate our stalwarts, Jonathan Goodhue and Elizabeth Clarkson, and suggested elegant banker's lamps to provide additional light and visual appeal on the desks.

We are extraordinarily grateful to member Susan Klein for her lead donation and challenge to raise the remaining half of the funds required for the project and to these members who contributed to the Members' Room fund: Jackie Aronson, Peter Buffington, Diane Brownstone, Jane Chirurg, Holly Clark, Bill Crookston and Marilyn A. Sauline, Ellen Feldman, Ella Foshay, Reily Hendrickson, Margaret High, Sidney Stark, Dena Weiner, and Harold Zeitlin.

On behalf of the entire membership, staff, and trustees, I thank all of our special donors for helping us beautify and brighten the very heart of our Library.

Carolyn Waters, Head Librarian



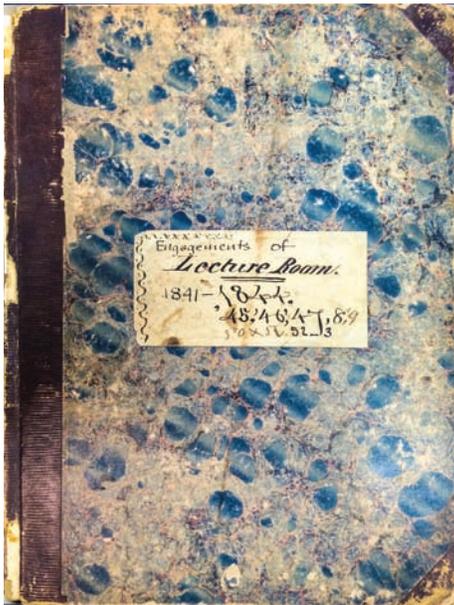
Architect's sketch of the Broadway building, showing the lecture-hall seating.

The twelve years from January 1841 to April 1853 saw over a thousand presentations in that hall. Comparison of the surviving lecture-hall rental ledger with contemporary newspapers and other archives yields glimpses of the names and faces, famous and not, that graced our accidental venue.

Ralph Waldo Emerson lit up the place with the gospel of Transcendentalism in March 1842 and February 1843. "He occupies so distinguished a position as a thinker of great originality and power, and a vivid and bold speaker," the *Evening Post* endorsed, "that it is hardly necessary for us to direct public attention to the subject." Among Emerson's 1842 hearers was the young editor of the *Brooklyn Eagle* newspaper, Walt Whitman. According to his biographer Jerome Loving, "Whitman...heard Emerson deliver an early version of 'The Poet' in the Society Library in Manhattan during the first week of March....There is little doubt that the *Eagle* editorship was his first important step to becoming a citizen of the world that Emerson had beckoned him to enter." *

Edgar Allan Poe lectured in the Library building in January and April 1845 on an obvious topic: 'Poets and Poetry of America.' Gloomily atmospheric rain kept the crowds away. He returned on February 3, 1848 on an odder subject: 'The Cosmogony of the Universe.' Poe may have been feeling close to the cosmos: he'd attempt suicide in November and die late the following year. The content of this lecture seems to have overlapped with his lengthy prose-poem 'Eureka,' published roughly six months later, in which he remarkably anticipates such 20th-century discoveries as the Big Bang.

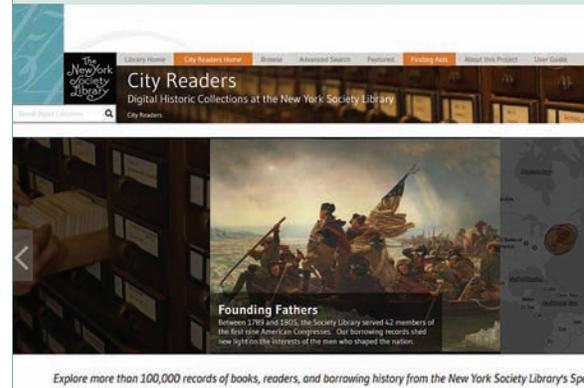
Sylvester Graham may not be on a par for greatness with Emerson or Poe, but how many American households contain no volumes of the latter two, yet boxes from the former? The Presbyterian minister and health campaigner gave at least six lectures in 1843 and 1844, covering vegetarianism, the "water cure," fads in disease treatment, and dancing—whether for or against, our sources don't tell. "He is rather ultra in his ideas of temperance," the *Commercial Advertiser* remarked, "but that is better than excess." Our ledger of lecture-hall rentals concludes in mystery: eleven close-written longhand pages of an anti-tobacco diatribe, attributed only to "Dr. ____." While that entry predates his Society Library appearances, Graham did preach far and wide against smoking. Perhaps the unnamed doctor was an acolyte.



*Lecture Room
New York Society Library
Engagements 1841.*

No.	Month	Day	Name	Charge	Remarks
16	Friday	Feb	Mr. Russell	15	Concert
17	Saturday		Church		Services
18	Sunday				
19	Monday				
20	Tuesday		Russell	15	
21	Wednesday				
22	Thursday		Lane Architects	16	Services
23	Friday		Russell	15	Concert
24	Saturday		Austin Phillips		Concert
25	Sunday				
26	Monday		Austin Phillips	15	Concert
27	Tuesday		Austin Phillips		Concert
28	Wednesday				
29	Thursday		Austin Phillips		Concert
30	Friday				

Search Our Archives



Explore more than 100,000 records of books, readers, and borrowing history from the New York Society Library's Special Collections.

On the less earnest side, actress and abolitionist Fanny Kemble booked the room for three dates in February 1850. She performed selections from Shakespeare with an emphasis on *Henry IV, Part II*, “in the variety of which,” said the *Evening Post*, “her powers of expression will find a large and appropriate field.” Notes in the ledger suggest that her powers of expression were not best served by the room’s acoustics, and she relocated for later performances.

Mrs. Kemble was far from the only abolitionist onstage at the Library. Sydney Howard Gay, editor of the *National Anti-Slavery Standard*, took the room later in the spring of 1850 for events with William Lloyd Garrison and the folk/protest ensemble the Hutchinson Family Singers. In *Douglass and Melville: Anchored Together in Neighborly Style*, Robert K. Wallach describes the resulting uproar. “A crowd of nativist New Yorkers led by ‘Captain’ Isaiah Rynders... shut down two successive meetings in the lecture hall of the New York Society Library...by a wild chaotic tumult and other rowdy demonstrations’..Garrison,



Fanny Kemble, photo from The Granger Collection, New York

Phillips, and others ‘essayed to speak, but in vain. The mob triumphed again, and that, too, in the presence of the police.’” † “Thus closed Anti-Slavery free discussion in New York for 1850,” sighed the *New York Tribune*. It is likely, though uncertain, that both Frederick Douglass and Herman Melville attended the aborted Library events.

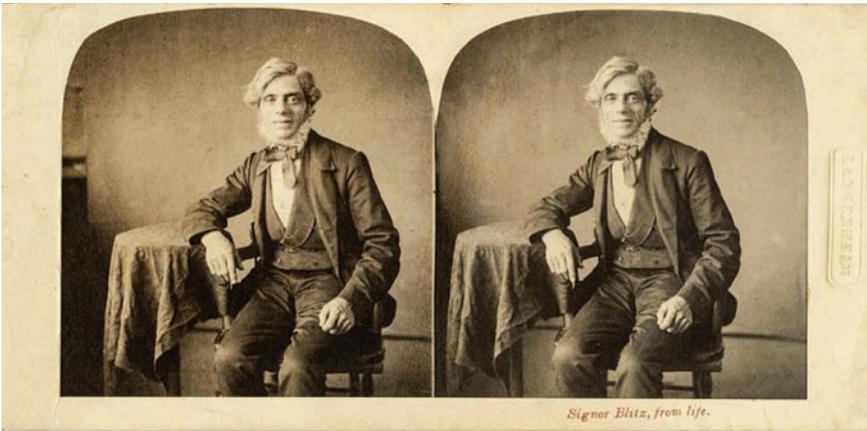
While the Library building welcomed those on the right side of history, it didn’t turn down \$15 a night from such groups as Campbell’s Minstrels, who probably wore blackface at their 1851 gigs.

We are proud to announce that the Library’s archive is fully processed and described, and a finding aid is now available in *City Readers* to help Library members, staff, and the public explore our long history of reading and writing in New York City.

The Library’s archive contains the records of our historic literary community from 1754 to 2000. Our circulation and acquisitions records tell stories of our collection: how it was built, and how it was used. Records of past Head Librarians and other staff and Library Trustees reveal the centuries-old collaboration that has facilitated our growth and survival to the present day. Collections of ephemera and records of our historic buildings add color to these stories, connecting the institution and our membership to day-to-day life in New York.

Projects to process our archive and make it available in *City Readers* were funded by the Delmas Foundation and the Florence Gould Foundation. This work would not have been possible without the tireless efforts of Edmée Reit, who maintained our historic collection as a volunteer for nearly two decades.

There are endless stories waiting to be discovered! Visit cityreaders.nysoclib.org and click the Finding Aids tab at the top of your screen to get started.



Signor Blitz, from life.



BROTHERS RAINER and their SISTER

Left: Signor Blitz and one of his posters, courtesy of The Library Company of Philadelphia. Right: The Rainers in Tyrolean garb.

Langstroth's Hall, Germantown
Amusements for Old and Young—Mirth, Happiness and Wonder!

2 AFTERNOONS and 2 EVENGS ONLY.

SIG. BLITZ
The Great Magician and Ventriloquist.

WITH HIS
Learned Canary Birds

Will give his GRAND PERFORMANCES, at the above Hall, on
On SATURDAY and MONDAY, May 16th and 18th, 1863
AFTERNOONS and EVENINGS.

Afternoon Performances commence 2 o'clock; Evening at 8. Doors open one hour previously.

Children, who your Parents let see BLITZ, Parents, who your Children let see BLITZ, and his
Canary Birds.

Come and Laugh—Come and see the Peppy Birds—The Amazing Birds—The Remarkable Birds—The Laughing
Birds—The Peppy Birds—The Birds who Make All Happy.

FUN! FUN! FUN!

PART I.—Signor Blitz will introduce every
New and Startling Deceptions in Thaumaturgy,
Ancient Sorcery and Natural Magic.

PART II.—Introduction of the Celebrated
LEARNED CANARY BIRDS
Who will go through their Wonderful Performances.

PART III.—Blitz, the Man of Many Years in his
Ventriloquial Scenes, assisted by **LITTLE BOBBY**
THE DYING and LIVING BIRD!

A new magical feat. A fine furnished room a lady will disappear from a gentleman's hand. A number of very
young ladies, having the ring placed on their fingers, will disappear from the room. The time given will be as long as the audience
will permit, and the same will be repeated.

No. 2. A woman disappears from the room.

INCOMPREHENSIBLE SNUFF BOX
STRANGE FEAT WITH A HANDKERCHIEF
ANIMAL PRODUCE

Performing the most astonishing feats ever witnessed. A gentleman's face being surrounded, will be shown in
various positions. A woman's face will be shown in various positions of surprise, terror, &c.

LEARNED Canary Birds
Who, at the word of command, will
Perform the Most Astonishing Feats.

THIRD—Signor BLITZ will introduce
VENTRILLOQUISM!

When he will be seen together with his wife and children. They will perform a number of very
amusing and surprising scenes. The number of persons who will be present, will be as long as the
audience will permit, and the same will be repeated.

The Evening's Entertainment will conclude with the Celebrated
DANCE OF SIX DINNER PLATES
ON A COMMON TABLE.

Arranged by Messrs. Deane, Watson, Smith, O'Brien, Colquhoun, &c.

LESSONS
Given by Signor BLITZ, at the above Hall, on SATURDAY and MONDAY, May 16th and 18th, 1863.

Admission, 25 Cents
CHILDREN 15 CENTS

© 1863 by Signor Blitz, Philadelphia.

Later documents list their program as a combination of sentimental ballads, comedy sketches, a ballet sequence, faux-Southern folk songs, and a “chorus operatic.” Early research points to musical entertainments as the hall’s staple, from Mr. Braham (“the king of song,” according to the *Evening Post*) to Mr. Clirehugh—“Scottish Minstrelsy, to consist of the Beauties of Burns, and the Ancient Humorous Dramatic Songs of Scotland.” The Rainers, Alpine family singers, played encores to packed houses in the early 1840s while dressed in quaint national costume. The trilingual ensemble is widely credited with the American popularization of ‘Silent Night.’ “The Lovers of Harmony, will be pleased to learn that these charming vocalists give their third Concert to-night, at Society Library,” raved the *Evening Post*. “Their simple and soul stirring airs, are certainly captivating.”

We can’t leave New York City past without visiting a presenter beloved by young and old alike. “Signor Blitz! Crowded Houses! Triumphant Success!! Fashionable Audiences!!! At the Society Library,” ran the *Evening Post* advertisement for the British magician born Antonio Van Zandt. *Commercial Advertiser* listings state that Signor Blitz was “still all the rage” after almost a month in the venue and praise “his feats with the rabbits, Canary birds, sweatmeats[sic], &c. &c.” Another issue adds, “His rabbit trick is said

to be wonderfully ingenious, and his dancing plates are marvels of dexterity and manual precision.” Born in 1810, “the Blitz who Makes All Happy” (as he named himself) was at the height of his powers that marvelous autumn of 1847, but his greatest achievements would come during the Civil War, when he tirelessly toured veterans’ hospitals like a one-man U.S.O.

In 1853, the Library moved out of the Broadway building, handing it on to the publishers D. Appleton & Co. Our new home on University Place would thrive on bookish focus until the shift to 79th Street in 1937. More than 130 years passed before the Library regularly offered events again. Today, of course, the Members’ Room showcases lecturers, poetry readers, actors, and musicians, with most events open both to Library members and nonmembers. But no learned canaries—they belong to the nineteenth century, just like our accidental venue.

* Loving, Jerome. *Walt Whitman: The Song of Himself*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1999.

+ Wallace, Robert K. *Douglass & Melville: Anchored Together in Neighborly Style*. New Bedford, Mass.: Spinner Publications, 2005.

THANKS TO ERIN SCHREINER FOR RESEARCH HELP ON THIS ARTICLE.

Members Speak

by Carolyn Waters, Head Librarian

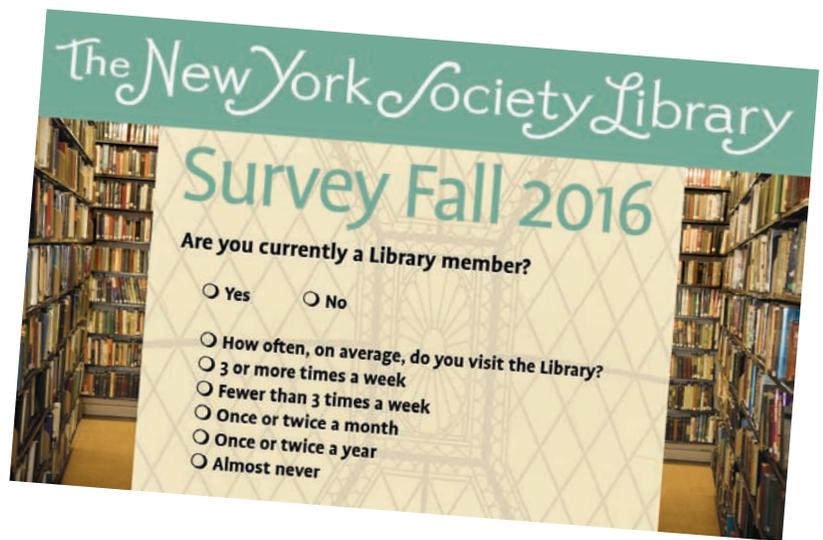
Sincere thanks to everyone who took our recent membership survey! An impressive 25% of the membership participated, as compared to average survey response rates of 10-15%.

I am eager to share what we learned about the Library experiences you value and what you wish we would improve. As we continue to analyze the survey results in detail, please know that the Board and I plan to continue to communicate additional findings and any recommendations we make as a result.

I'll start with communications, because one of the most important things to us is making sure that our membership and the public know more about who we are and stay well informed about our programs, services, and activities. Survey respondents overwhelmingly prefer to hear from us via email over all other communication methods. We aren't going to abandon our other methods of reaching you, but we hope you've noticed that we have been including more articles, information, announcements, and special offers for members, along with events listings, in our once-a-month electronic newsletter. You might now be reading this article in print, but it was originally published on our blog and included as a link in the November e-newsletter. So if you're not already on our mailing list, sign up to receive it at nysoclib.org/about/join-mailing-list. But do also peruse our website and find us on social media—we're active on Facebook and on Twitter (@nysoclib).

While we learned that how you use the Library does vary by member age—those under 50 are more likely to use the Library as a place to work/study than other age groups—still, 76% overall indicated that you come to the New York Society Library to borrow print books. That's music to our ears—or maybe more accurately words to our eyes! We purchase more than 4,000 print books a year (and continue to add to our e-book collection) and we will continue to offer book recommendation articles on our website on a wide variety of topics, designed to help you discover the hidden gems and marvels in our open stacks. Of course, a great number of you also told us that our staff was one of the things you most loved about the Library—and all of us are more than happy to talk about books, books, books!

Given the responses to how you use the Library, we were not surprised to learn that for all age groups, the experiences you value most are browsing the open stacks, checking out books, and reading in a quiet, comfortable space.



For members aged 30-69, sharing a congenial workspace was also very important.

Seventy-one percent of respondents reported attending Library events, of which lectures were the most popular form across the board. Children's programs were next for those aged 30-49, while it was seminars and performances for everyone else.

The most useful and interesting parts of our survey were the open-ended questions. We asked *What should we work to improve?* and nearly a quarter of the responses to this question were actually positive, along the lines of "I really can't think of anything!" "Keep up what you are doing!" and "No improvements necessary. It's the greatest place." While those responses are certainly heartening, we are listening to those of you who reported issues and gave us your wish lists. We know we need to improve the reliability and speed of the Wi-Fi throughout the building. As I write this, we're researching feasible, cost-effective options that we can implement as quickly as possible. Many of you noted that we could use more workspaces in general, but some also asked for a place to have a drink or a snack, hold a meeting, or make a telephone call. Though we don't currently have the available space to accommodate these requests and we remain ever vigilant about maintaining a clean, odor-free, and pest-free environment for working, reading, and preserving our valuable book collection, we will revisit these requests as we discuss possible future building expansion.

When we look at the words that pop up most often in the answers to the question *What would you most like us to know?* we see "love," along with "wonderful," "helpful," and "great." We're still poring over all the responses, but what strikes us as we read these comments is that they are testimonials to how devoted you all are to the institution and how much the Library is a valued part of your lives. We'll publish some of these wonderful comments in future communications. In the meantime, we will continue to maintain and improve this very special place we all love so much.

25 Reasons to Love the Children's Library

by Lorrie Bodger, Library Member

In the Children's Library there's a small sign: **Thank YOU for being a reader.** We're thrilled that you like to read and we want you to come often to this library-within-a-library that's been specially designed with children in mind. Adults are welcome to stop in for advice, book suggestions, or consultations with Head of the Children's Library Randi Levy or with Children's Librarians Susan Vincent Molinaro and Danielle Gregori. Adults may even take out books from the CL, but if they want to spend time here, they should be accompanied by a child. This is kids' territory!

Here are even *more* reasons to love the Children's Library.

1. Calling All Kids

The "children" in Children's Library means kids from infancy through high school. Really.

2. New for You

Completely renovated in 2013, the CL is made for you: polished oak tables and chairs for doing homework, writing a story, or drawing a picture...kid-sized upholstered chairs and a pair of built-in settees for curling up and reading...yards and yards of built-in shelves of books.

★ Toys too! Babar, Celeste, and lots of other stuffed animals, and a big stack of puzzles.

3. Easy Peasy

Look at as many books as you want—and if you don't care to borrow them, simply leave them on one of the blue carts.

★ The Library staff will reshelve them later. How great is that?

4. Something for Everyone

Go to *any* part of the Children's Library you prefer and take out *any* books you enjoy, but mostly the little kids and new readers hang out in the Picture Book Room; grade schoolers go to the main room, where the tables are; middle-schoolers find books especially for them in the Whitridge Room.

5. Teen Faves

High schoolers have a book section of their own: climb one flight up the back stairs and enter Stack 9; turn right and follow the arrows to the far end. Turn left, walk half-way along the aisle—and on the left you'll find shelves of Young Adult (YA) books.



6. Baby, Baby, Baby

Infants and toddlers in the Children's Library? Sure! Parents can read with their babies, or toddlers can read alone (accompanied by a parent, grandparent, or child-care provider).

7. Picture Books, Board Books

These are for the youngest Library users (see #6) and school children too. Look (or ask) for the section of miniature books, like *Peter Rabbit*. The board books are kept on a low shelf, reachable by the littlest kids.

8. Library Voices

In most libraries the librarians say, "Shh!" Our Children's Library isn't like that. We try to keep the noise down (since it's a shared space) but you *don't* have to whisper. Just use your normal library voice.

9. Reading Aloud

When you're learning to read, it's fun to read out loud—and in the Children's Library you may indeed do that (using your library voice).

★ It's also fun to have your grownup read aloud *to you*, which is A-OK in the CL.

10. The Rule of Nine

If you're nine or older, you're invited to use the Children's Library all by yourself. If you're not yet nine years old, please bring your parent, caregiver, or another adult member with you.

11. A Date with Grandpa or Grandma

Coming to the Children's Library with your grandparents is an awesome way to spend an afternoon. You don't even have to be a member as long as your grandparents are.

12. Caregivers, Come On In!

If your caregiver is listed in your family's membership record, she or he is welcome to accompany you to the CL. She's responsible for following the rules—just as *you* are.

13. Getting to Know You

When the librarians get to know what you like to read, they'll tell you if there's a book they think you'd especially enjoy or if your favorite author has published a new book.

14. You'll Never Run Out of Books

The CL buys new books all the time. The librarians choose books that have received stellar reviews.

★ Our Promise: You'll always have excellent new and classic books to read.

15. Check Them Out

Did you know that you're allowed to check out and take home all sorts of kids' magazines? *American Girl*, *Highlights*, *Cricket*, *Nat Geo Kids*, and lots more.

16. Play, Play, and Put Away

Play with the toys as much as you want. When you're finished playing, please return them to their homes on the shelves.

17. What Should I Read Next?

On the NYSL website, go to Home>For Children>For Parents. That screen offers you and your family reliable reading lists that lead you to a variety of fine books.

★ Look for the colorful *printed* reading lists in the CL, near the librarian's desk.

18. Events for Kids and Teens

The CL offers events for kids of ALL ages. Most are free. Some are drop-in, others require registration; some are for a member + guest. Learn about them on the NYSL website: Go to Home>Our Events. On the current calendar, hover your cursor over anything titled "CHILDREN," and all the event information will pop up.

★ For a complete list: Home>For Children>Events at the Children's Library.

21. Using the Computer, Getting Online

Kids aged three to eighteen are allowed to use the CL computer. Or bring your laptops and tablets and use our Wi-Fi.



4



15



4



18



18

Photos by Simen Kot

19. Audio CDs and Downloadable Audiobooks

Audiobook CDs for kids are housed in the Children's Library. Downloadable audiobooks (more than 1000!) are accessible via the OneClickdigital database. Need help? Ask the librarian.

20. E-Books and More E-Books

Our growing collection of e-books (including nonfiction) is for both kids and teens. E-books are found in the Cloud Library.

22. Homework Help Links

On the NYSL website, go to Home>For Children>Homework Help for a plethora of online links that will give you a hand with reading, writing, math, history, science, and more. (And if you don't know what "plethora" means, there's a dictionary link on the website too.)

23. Young Writers Awards

The YWA are given yearly to honor excellence in children's writing, and the competition is open to kids and grandkids of NYSL members. Children in grades three through twelve are eligible. Read more about it on the website: Home>For Children>Young Writers Awards.

★ This event is a *very big deal*.

24. Project Cicero

We participate in an *outstanding* nonprofit partnership (of teachers, students, schools, publishers, and other important groups) that collects and distributes books to under-resourced NYC classrooms. Please bring your new or gently used children's and YA book donations to the Library from March 1-8, 2017.

★ Don't miss this! And read more about it at projectcicero.org.

25. Keeping You Posted

Sign up for the Children's Library e-newsletter at children@nysoclib.org and get frequent updates on events for all ages, plus quick links, Library hours, and lots more useful info.

★ Look for book recommendations and special features too.

Lorrie Bodger, author of more than thirty nonfiction books, also edits, teaches, and writes fiction.

Honoring Those Who Have Been Members For Forty Years Or More

“One of the lovely things about this place is the gradient of the steps,” Ms. Hazzard said, “and that you can wander the stacks without being suspected of anything nefarious.”

Barbara Lazear Ascher quoted Shirley Hazzard in her charming *New York Times* article “Honoring Readers Gentle and Genteel,” published December 14, 2008. Ms. Hazzard, a fifty-year member and thirty-year trustee at the time, was the guest speaker at the Library’s first event to honor members of forty years or more. Ms. Ascher herself had just become a forty-year member.

On October 17th, the Library hosted its fifth celebration of long-term members with 50 guests in the newly refurbished Members’ Room. Remarkably, this group now includes 181 memberships: 110 from the Seventies, 62 from the Sixties, eight from the Fifties, and one esteemed member, Nancy Berry, who joined seventy-six years ago.

The festive evening began with mingling, food, and drink. Author and thirty-year member Roger F. Pasquier gave a wonderful talk about his book *Painting Central Park*, published in September 2015. He led a virtual tour through the park, using magnificent paintings by major American and European artists. Mr. Pasquier spoke about how valuable the Society Library’s collection and staff were while doing the research for the book.

We are very proud to have so many remarkably loyal members, and we thank them for their devotion to the Library.



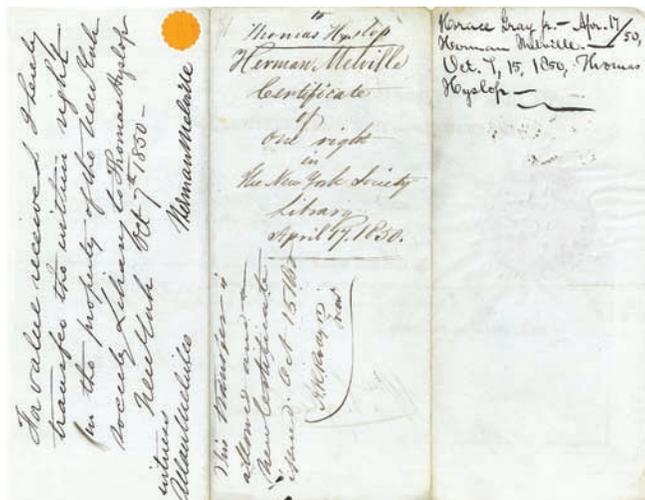
Left to right: Library trustee Charles G. Berry and his mother, Nancy Berry; Priscilla Tucker, Roger Pasquier, and Alison Tung



Left to right: Laurie Lisle and Roy Carlin; Michael Kowal, Nancy Harrow, Jan Krukowki, and Colin Eisler; Tom and Alice Fleming; Lucienne and Claude Bloch; Christopher and Stephanie Porterfield; Rosalie Byard with Head Librarian Carolyn Waters; Jane and James Rhodes; Harriet and Michael Leahy

Herman Melville's New York, 1850

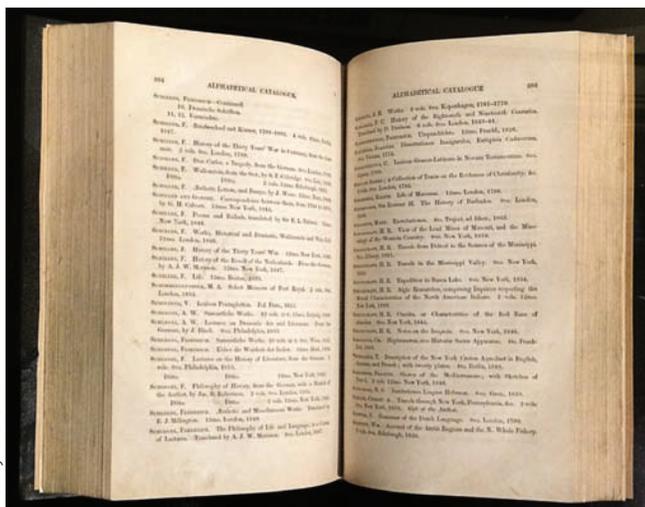
From September 12 to November 7, the Assunta, Ignazio, Ada and Romano Peluso Exhibition Gallery hosted a small exhibition of rare books and archival materials revealing the New York City of Herman Melville around the time he created *Moby-Dick*. Special Collections Librarian Erin Schreiner curated.



The New York Society Library

Share in the Library, purchased by Herman Melville from Horace Gray Jr., 1850 (verso) (from the New York Society Library Institutional Archive)

Herman Melville (1819-1891) was an on-again-off-again member of the Society Library throughout his adult life. After a brief membership in 1848, Melville bought a new share from Horace Gray Jr. in April 1850. His brother, Allan, bought a share from Maurice Leyne at the same time, and both Melvilles re-sold their shares that autumn when they moved from New York to Pittsfield, Massachusetts. Herman Melville would also use the Library near the end of his life after inheriting a share from a relative.



The New York Society Library

Alphabetical and Analytical Catalogue of the New York Society Library: With the Charter, by-Laws, &c., of the Institution. (New York: R. Craighead, Printer, 1850)

Moby-Dick's story begins, famously, “Call me Ishmael,” but the book itself starts with an etymological notice on the word whale and “EXTRACTS (SUPPLIED BY A SUB-SUB-LIBRARIAN).” Melville introduces himself there as the “mere painstaking burrower and grub-worm of a poor devil of a Sub-Sub,” and this 1850 catalog lists nearly all the sources he gathered.

Photo by Karen Smul



The New York Society Library

Circulation Ledger, 1847-1850.

(From the New York Society Library Institutional Archive)

While he did not borrow many books, Melville visited the Library regularly. In December 1850, his wife Elizabeth described their daily routine in a letter to her stepmother, Hope Savage Shaw: “After dinner is over, Herman and I come to our room, and enjoy a cosy chat for an hour or so....Then he goes down town for a walk, and looks at the papers in the reading room....”

Photo by Karen Smul



Map of the City of New-York with part of Brooklyn and Williamsburgh: population in the year 1850: 450,000 inhabitants. (New York: Charles Magnus & Co., 1850. Reproduction freely obtained through New York Public Library Digital Collections.)

The pins in this map show the workplaces or homes of Library members who checked out Melville's books. Melville's early readers lived and worked in the same places he did, around Wall Street and the waterfront, and near Washington and Union Squares. The Library was on Broadway at Leonard Street, which points toward the S in Hudson on the map.

William Scoresby (1789-1857)

An Account of the Arctic Regions with a History and Description of the Northern Whale-Fishery. (Edinburgh: Printed for Archibald Constable & Co.; London: Hurst, Robinson and Co., 1820)

This was one of two books that Melville borrowed in April of 1850, six months before he moved to Pittsfield, Massachusetts. He kept this book and Scoresby's *Journal of a Voyage to the Northern Whale-Fishery* out for over thirteen months, returning them in June 1851. *Moby-Dick* was published just four months later.



Photo by Karen Smul

For more exhibition images and information, see nysoclib.org/events/melville-popup-exhibition.

Broken Beauty: Ruins of the Ancient World



Photo by Harriet Shapiro

Open to the Public

Thursday November 17, 2016-Thursday, August 31, 2017

The Assunta, Ignazio, Ada and Romano Peluso Exhibition Gallery
Free of Charge

Broken Beauty: Ruins of the Ancient World is the New York Society Library's first exhibition devoted to legendary sites in the Middle East and beyond. Destruction has always been the handmaiden of history. But the 2015 bombing of the Temple of Baalshamin in the Syrian city of Palmyra compelled us to examine our collection of books on the historic cities of Paestum, Petra, Persepolis, and Baalbek, among others.

"Ruin-fever," as one writer described it, runs like an electrical current through many of these early accounts. The travelers from Sir Austen Henry Layard to Vita Sackville-West are nearly all struck with awe at what the past, however fractured and senselessly deconstructed, reveals. We hope that mounting an exhibition of this dimension will allow visitors to the Peluso Family Exhibition Gallery to experience the beauty of these legendary ruins. In the end, words may outlive what has been lost.

THIS EXHIBITION IS GENEROUSLY FUNDED IN PART BY THE THOMAS E. DEWEY FUND, THE HAZEN POLSKY FOUNDATION, AND BY A GIFT IN MEMORY OF SUSAN GOODSTEIN LERNER



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One More Picture



Moderator Joseph Goodrich chats with authors Charles Ardai, Elizabeth Zelvin, Julia Dahl, and Parnell Hall in our panel co-sponsored with Mystery Writers of America New York, September 21.