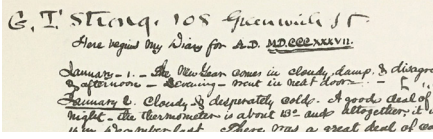


Books & People

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Photo by Harriet Shapiro

Meet the New Neighbors

Central Park unveiled this new monument on August 26. The sculptor is Library member Meredith Bergmann, well known for her beautiful and thoughtful bronzes including the Cathedral of St. John the Divine's September 11th Memorial and the Boston Women's Memorial. Ms. Bergmann is also a published writer and a film production designer. The Library is delighted to add this new "neighbor" in this centennial year for women's suffrage. Learn more at meredithbergmann.com.

Greetings from the Head Librarian

For many, missing the society of others was one of the more trying parts of navigating the worst of the pandemic. Sure, we have Zoom, but I think we can all agree that it's not the same as sharing a friendly chat around the tea cart, *Itsy Bitsy Spider* in the Whitridge Room, book reviews with the Circulation staff, or even the sound of silence while writing or studying in the company of fellow members in the Hornblower Room.

It meant so much to me personally when we reopened. Seeing staff and members again, in real life, has been a great joy. Catching up on what you all have been reading, watching the books circulate again (after a 3-day quarantine), feeling the building hum with activity (even if it is at half capacity), does feel a little like life before. We don't know how long it will be before we'll be able to doff the mask and gather for a lecture in the Members' Room again, but we are all looking forward to that day. In the meantime, if you're comfortable stepping inside, we'd love to see you, and for those of who aren't yet ready, we'll keep pulling your book requests and looking for you at digital teatime (Fridays, 3:00 PM).

And for those Society Library members we lost not just to the virus over the past seven months: we will remember you when we read the words you wrote here and see the books we know you loved.



Carolyn

—Carolyn Waters, Head Librarian

The Public and Private Life of George Templeton Strong

by Harriet Shapiro

2020 marks the 200th anniversary of the birth of George Templeton Strong. Today he is recognized as a brilliant diarist—to 19th-century New York City what Samuel Pepys was to 17th-century London.

From 1835 to 1875, George Templeton Strong recorded the political, social and cultural world of New York City and its environs. Among historians Strong is especially recognized for his record of the Civil War. His reportage extended far beyond the city's confines and broadened, in the words of the historian Allan Nevins, into a stirring national record now considered one of the most compelling historical documents of the American experience.

But no friends, colleagues, or family, only his wife Ellen, knew that he wrote in a private journal nearly every day until his death. For almost forty years Strong's life and the city's inexorably intertwined, but hidden from the eyes of the world. The journal was his sanctum sanctorum.

In the public arena, Strong was the very model of a Victorian gentleman, admired as a fine lawyer and honorable citizen, dedicated to a life of public service. Many nights after leaving his father's law firm, he headed north to one of innumerable meetings—he was a trustee at the New York Society Library, at Columbia College, and at St. Luke's Hospital; co-founder of the Columbia School of Law and the School of Mines, vestryman at Trinity Church Wall Street; and a founding member of the Union League Club of New York. During the Civil War, Strong served as treasurer of the United States Sanitary Commission. These were the outlines of Strong's public life, shaped by an innate modesty so strong that when his name was put forth for the presidency of Columbia College, he recoiled from the prospect. It would be, he wrote "a positive degradation to which I would not submit."

Strong's heirs saved the journals but kept them private until 1927. Hearing of this remarkable find, historians Allan Nevins and Milton Halsey Thomas began the momentous work of transcribing and preparing the journal for publication. It took ten years and was published by Macmillan in 1952. The original journals are now in the collection of the New-York Historical Society.

George Templeton Strong was born in 1820 into an upper-middle-class family marked by probity and very much at ease with the city's leading families. In 1835, the year Strong began his diary, New York boasted 250,000 people. His energetic exploration of the city, often on foot, might well have been influenced by his high-minded father. George Washington Strong was a prominent lawyer who daily rose at 5:30 AM to ride horseback through that curious little city.

As a young boy, his son, a precocious student, performed brilliantly at Columbia Grammar School and graduated with high honors from Columbia College.

On Monday, October 5, 1835, Strong penned his first entry. "108 Greenwich Street, New York. Went to college at half-past seven and had the pleasure of remaining there *solus* till half-past nine. Matriculated for the Sophomore year, and had the most atrocious pen to write my name with that mortal ever beheld."

Deeply interested in literature and journalism, with “a great passion for music”—Strong played the piano, the oboe, and the viola—he once wrote that it was his father, “the old gentleman,” who pushed him into the “wilderness” of the law. Strong passed the bar easily and entered his father’s law firm, where he remained for nearly the rest of his life. His father once said he was by far the best clerk he had ever had.

Within the pages of his journal Strong revealed himself as introspective, subject to melancholic moods, and excessively modest. In the words of historian Daniel Aaron, he possessed an “enormous and varied list of antipathies.” They included the Irish, the Jews, African Americans, the French, and Cubans. But as Aaron writes, Strong often undercut his own biases, turning on his colleagues and not infrequently on himself. He saved some of his scathing critiques for people of “vast wealth, weak minds, and no resources within.”

As a lawyer, he found attending to the affairs of old ladies tiresome. “If any more old women’s wills come into the office,” he complained, “I shall certainly secure an early passage to Texas.”

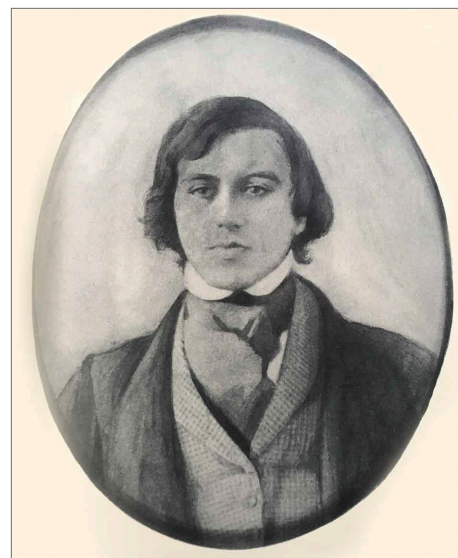
Trustee meetings were also a source of lifelong aggravation, including the New York Society Library’s. “There’s an insurrection in that very venerable and somnolent institution,” he noted in 1854. “An opposition ticket is printed, and my name is on it....The present board consists, no doubt, of incurable fogies, and I’ve no objection to the insurgents succeeding to their hearts’ desire....Don’t think I’ll serve for many reasons... Besides, this coup d’état will be followed by others like it, now that a revolutionary precedent is established, and the new board will sooner or later share the fate of the old.”

Music was a vital part of Strong’s life. For several years he was president of the New York Philharmonic Society. After a May 1851 concert by the Swedish soprano Jenny Lind, he noted, “All that I heard her sing was over-loaded with *florituri* and foolery, marvelously executed, but I always find that sort of thing a bore....A man who could walk on his head as comfortably as on his feet would be a fatiguing person to look at, if he abused his faculty of locomotion and was habitually upside down.”

Strong was deeply shaken by the loss of his father, who died after a brief illness on June 27, 1855. On July 10 he wrote, “My father died Wednesday night at about twenty minutes after ten, aged 72 years, five months, and seven days....I don’t yet realize it. I find myself every morning expecting to see him in his accustomed place at the desk....When I think of it as a fact that is indeed true, I feel like a child that has lost his way in the street. For while he was here, I felt safe in his advice and judgment and ready aid against all trouble, disaster, and perplexity, sure that there could be no embarrassment he could not set right, no difficulty from which he could not extricate me....”

Strong wrote about fires, murder trials, hydropathy and the spiritualist mania. But he also noted the growth of the yellow fever epidemic, close enough to cause alarm, noting on August 14, 1856, “...men are very susceptible of panic when the word *epidemic* is whispered to them. On the Battery tonight, the sudden recollection that the cool sea-breeze I was enjoying came from somewhere near the Quarantine, over nine miles of moonlit saltwater, quickened my walk for a moment.”

Strong was also increasingly concerned with political and social issues foreshadowing the coming Civil War, writing on October 19, 1856: “It strikes me that this institution—slavery as it exists at the south with all its ‘safe-guards’ and

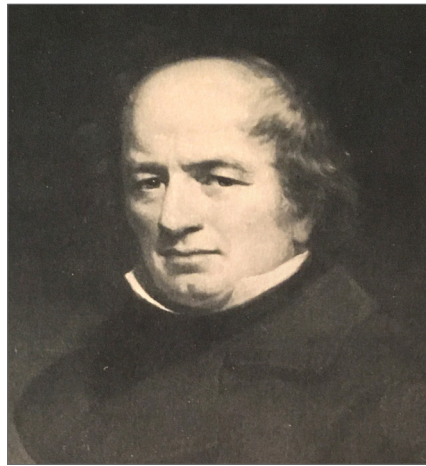


From top: George Templeton Strong, c. 1838 (The New-York Historical Society); Executive Committee of the Sanitary Commission, Strong standing second from left, 1864 (The New-York Historical Society); The New York Society Library on University Place (The New York Society Library)

'necessary legislation'—is the greatest crime on the largest scale known in modern history; taking into account the time it has occupied, the territory it covers, the number of its subjects, and the civilization of the criminals. It is deliberate legislation intended to extinguish and annihilate the moral being of men for profit; systematic murder, not of the physical, but of the moral and intellectual being; blasphemy not in word, but in systematic action against the Spirit of God which dwells in the souls of men to elevate, purify, and ennoble them."

To this day Strong's reportage remains one of the most powerful records of the Civil War. As treasurer of the U.S. Sanitary Commission, which dealt with wounds and sickness in the field, Strong played a heroic role. By war's end he had raised nearly \$5 million for the Union's soldiers.

Strong found time to attend trustee meetings and to visit the newly created Central Park, but work for the Commission remained his most urgent obligation. On July 1, 1864 he traveled with his young son Johnny down the James River to observe the ongoing war preparations of the U.S. Army of the Potomac. "The air is black with innumerable turkey-buzzards; indeed, these foul birds are visible everywhere on the banks of the James River...The waters swarming with transports, hospital boats, tugs, gunboats and light steamers and all manner of river craft. Land in a scene of matchless dust, confusion, and activity...The shore is lined three deep, yes, six deep, with barges; steamers are screeching, corrals of mules braying—but I can do no justice to the sights and sounds of the place. All this is on or beside a strip of river shore. Back of this is a bank covered with fine trees and shrubs that were green once, but are now ash-colored and gray. Among them are tents of the same neutral tint...on the bank, there is a refreshing bit of warm color, the flag of Grant's headquarters. Looking still farther, you make out dimly through the yellow dust-saturated air the outline of a long series of pavilion hospitals, where 6,000 sick and wounded



men (too sorely hurt or too ill to be on transportation) are stifling as they breathe the sluggish, heavy current of dust that keeps pouring in upon them. High up against the blue sky stand great columns of coppery dust, hardly moving."

Strong was beginning to lose faith in what he described as "The great experiment of democracy." On September 6, 1864 he wrote that "[It] may be destined to fail a century sooner than I expected in disastrous explosion and general chaos, and this our grand republic over which we have bragged so offensively may be cast down as a great milestone into the sea and perish utterly—and all this within sixty days from the date of these presents.... All the South and half the North are absolutely demented."

After Lincoln's assassination he was "stunned, as by a fearful personal calamity." On April 16, 1865 in New York City he noted, "An Easter Sunday unlike any I have seen....Nearly every building in Broadway and in all the side streets, as far as one could see, festooned lavishly with black and white muslin. Columns swathed in the same material. Rosettes pinned to window curtains. Flags at half mast and tied up with crape. I hear that even in second and third class quarters, people who could afford to do no more have generally displayed at least a little twenty-five cent flag with a little scrap of crape annexed. Never was a public mourning more spontaneous and general."

By 1875, Strong's health, which had bothered him for much of his adult life, faltered. Death came on July 21, 1875. After his death no flags flew at half-mast to honor his contributions to the city he loved. There were many contributions, but the greatest of them all was yet to be discovered.

From top: Ellen Ruggles Strong, July 1864; portrait of George Washington Strong by William Sidney Mount, 1844 (The New-York Historical Society); Strong seated second from left at Fortress Monroe, June 4, 1861 (The New-York Historical Society); Lincoln's Funeral at the East Room of the White House, April 19, 1865 (Harper's Weekly, May 6, 1865)

In Memoriam: Two Titans of the Library

Barbara Hadley Stanton, who died on March 14, was the Library's first female Chair of the Board, but that was only the culmination of an influential tenure at the Library. She became a member back in 1956 and joined the Board of Trustees in 1988, ultimately taking the chair 2012-2016. Throughout her time on the Board, she helmed or served on uncountable committees, involved in everything from maintaining the Library's finances and advising on building improvements to generating event ideas, seeking new trustees, and planning our 250th anniversary festivities. She also oversaw the adaptation of our analog catalog to digital form and was a central contributor to the beautiful renovation of the Children's Library in 2013.

Barbara held a Master's in Urban Planning from Columbia University and was also particularly interested in the practices of institutional boards themselves, authoring a handbook on school trusteeship that ran to six editions and is now available via Google Books. Prior to the creation of a staff-run Development department, Barbara drafted all the Library's fundraising messages and contributed a small column, "The Wallet" to our early newsletters. In the debut issue, she noted that "the first use of *wallet* is in Chaucer as a word for a bag that holds provisions and books. A century-and-a-half later, the meaning had expanded to include a beggar's bag. What better metaphor could there be for a library's fundraising endeavors?"

Insightful, incisive, and logical in response to almost any question that could arise, Barbara was valued as a thoughtful counselor by trustees, Head Librarians, staff, and members. In 2007, then-Board Chair Charles G. Berry praised "Barbara Stanton, who has as much institutional knowledge of the Library as virtually anyone. She has spearheaded our development efforts in the past and, in a quiet but effective way, steered so many of the Library's activities with her tact, good judgment, and good cheer. We are most fortunate to have her steady hand and intelligent experience."

William J. Dean, who passed away on August 16, was a defining figure in the life of the New York Society Library for three decades. A member of the Library beginning around 1970, he joined the Board of Trustees in 1989 and served as Chair of the Board from 1992 to 2005. His time as Chair saw



William J Dean, left; Barbara Hadley Stanton, right

the Library emerge into the shape it is today. It included the beginning of Library events, the creation of our website, the founding of the New York City Book Awards, the start of Project Cicero, and the celebration of our 250th anniversary. Following his time as Chair, Bill continued his engagement with the Board, becoming the founding chair of the Goodhue Society (our legacy society) in 2010.

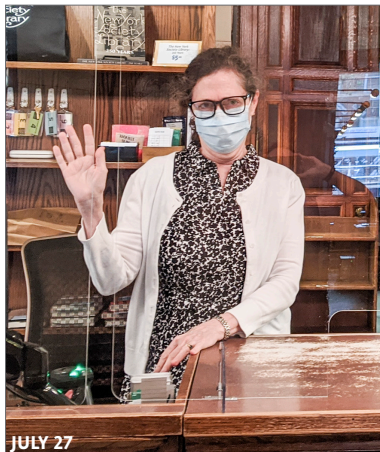
He was also a writer, publishing *My New York: A Life in the City* in 2013 (with a debut in the Members' Room), *Into Distant Countries: Travels and Personal Journeys* in 2014, and *Before Us on the Road: Passages from My Reading* in 2019. His op-eds and personal essays appeared in *The New York Times*, *The Wall Street Journal*, *The Christian Science Monitor*, and most recently in a regular column for *Indian Economy & Market* magazine.

To his many roles at the Library Bill brought elegant public speaking skills, efficient leadership, good-humored encouragement, and a boundless enthusiasm for New York City, for books, and for those who loved both, past and present. His Annual Report as Chair from the spring of 2003 consisted entirely of his fantasy about visiting the Library in 1758 when it was one City Hall room. "As a lawyer," he says, "I would be duty-bound to glance at Acherley's *Britannic Constitution* in folio, Grotius' *On the Law of War and Peace*; Cicero's *Orations* in three volumes, and select trials at the Old Bailey," but ultimately, "As closing time approached...I would select *Tom Jones*." Elsewhere he waxed lyrical about the collection: "Chekhov has become my favorite writer. I have a framed picture of him on my office wall. And all because I came upon him one day while exploring Stack 5. Library members, what adventures await you in the stacks!"

OUR UNUSUAL YEAR

- ◆ March 9 – The Library sends its first message to members about COVID-19 precautions in the building
- ◆ March 11 – Last in-person Members' Room event (Sean D. Moore on *Slavery and the Making of Early American Libraries*)
- ◆ March 13 – Announcement that the Library will close March 16-31
- ◆ March 14-15 – A record number of book checkouts on our last weekend before the closure
- ◆ March 22 – New York State on PAUSE executive order goes into effect
- ◆ March-April – Big uptick in e-book and e-magazine circulation

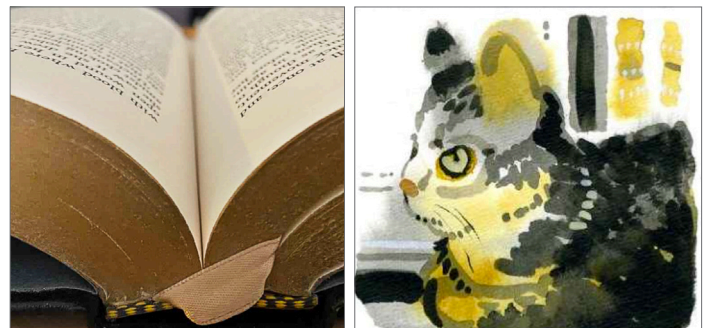
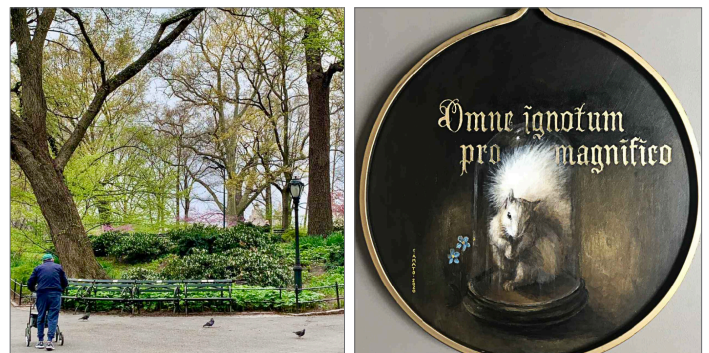
- ◆ April 3 – First Digital Teatime
- ◆ April 6 – First previously scheduled major event moved online (Pamela Newkirk on *Diversity, Inc.*)
- ◆ April 9 and 17 – The first Children's Library virtual storytimes premiere on YouTube and go live on Zoom
- ◆ May 7 – First "born digital" major event (Eric K. Washington on *Boss of the Grips*)
- ◆ May 18 – In a special video message, Stacy Schiff encourages members to donate, renew memberships, and donate again
- ◆ May 18, May 30, and June 5 – We offer events made for this season about working from home, being happier in quarantine, and Mental Health Month with Maggie Jackson, Gretchen Rubin, and Freddy Kpeli and Marialuisa Monda



- ◆ May 20 – Nicholas Birns begins our first seminar created for Zoom, on *Don Quixote*
- ◆ June 8 – Recent joiners met staff and each other at a Zoom-style New Members Party
- ◆ June 22 – The Library reopens for sidewalk book pickup
- ◆ July 27 – The Library reopens the stacks and Children’s Library for member browsing
- ◆ September 8 – We reopen reading and study spaces to members, and the Peluso Family Exhibition Gallery to the public, with limited capacity, social distancing, and masks required
- ◆ September 21 – The Children’s/YA librarians announce a handpicked book bundle service for readers

COMMUNITY ARCHIVE: OUR MEMBERS & COVID-19

This gallery showcases how members and staff have spent some of their days during the COVID-19 outbreak.



From top left: Ayun Halliday (top two images); Susan Gaffney; Christina Amato; Linda Winston; Christopher Raschka; Barbara Bieck



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available in electronic
form at nysoclib.org

One More Picture



Spring's Live from the Library turned into "Live from Your Living Room" with live readings of members' new and recent work, April 14.