



# LIBRARY NOTES

THE NEW YORK SOCIETY LIBRARY NEWSLETTER,  
VOLUME I, NUMBER I, JUNE 1994

## To Library Members

WILLIAM J. DEAN, CHAIRMAN  
BOARD OF TRUSTEES

This is, I believe, the first newsletter in the Library's 240-year history. The Library needs a newsletter now because we have much information to share with you, and this is the best way of doing so.

We are expanding the collection and conserving our present books. We are computerizing some of our operations. We are planning a three-year series of lectures and forums on biography writing, and arranging our fifth Author/Member Lecture Series to take place next year. We are conducting a major capital fund drive, organizing an exhibition on the Library's history to be displayed on the second-floor landing, and doing many other things.

*Library Notes*, the name of our newsletter, will have regular features, such as "Shelf Talk" by Librarian, Mark Piel, and "The Wallet," by Barbara Stanton, Development Committee Chair. There will be notes on Library staff, members and trustees, and items from the Library's fascinating history. Lectures and other events will be announced in *Library Notes*.

We welcome your comments on this first issue of *Library Notes* and your suggestions for future issues. Please address them to: *Library Notes*, The New York Society Library, 53 East 79th Street, New York, N.Y. 10021.

## THE SPENCER BYARD FUND

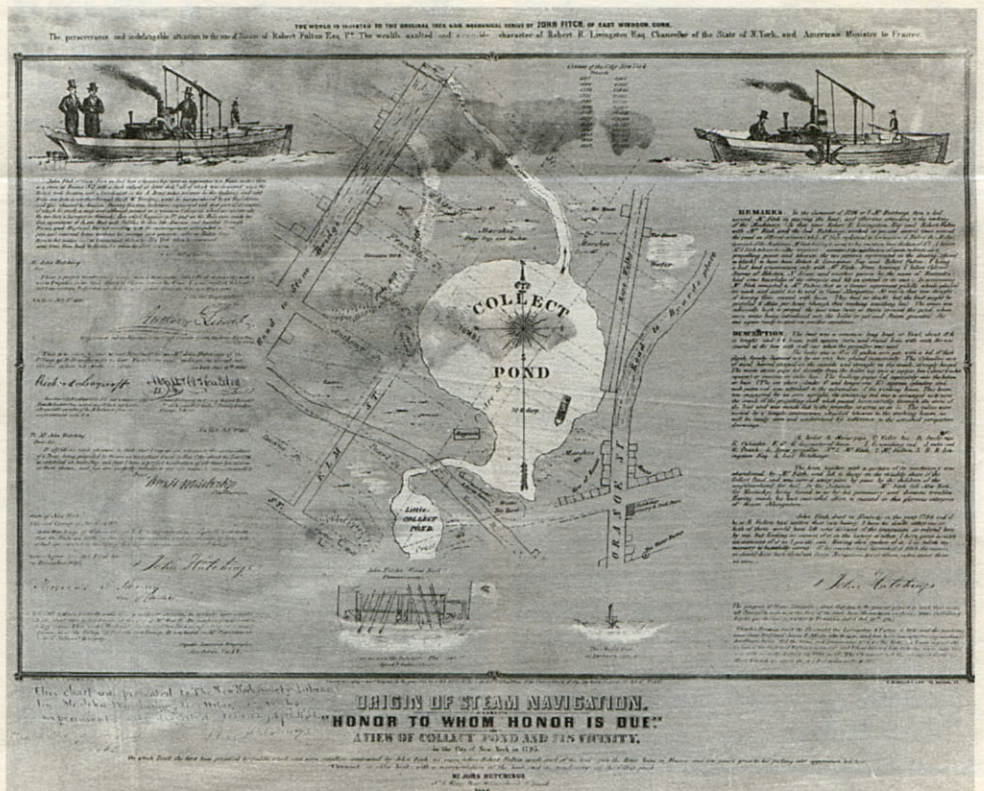
HENRY S. F. COOPER, JR.

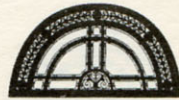
At the Annual Meeting on May 11, a restored and newly framed map from our archives, shown below, was dedicated to Spencer Byard, chairman of the Library from 1979-1985, secretary for the previous quarter century, and at the time of his death in 1992, a member of the Board for forty years. To date, donations to a memorial fund from his friends total \$2500. His wife, Margaret Mather Byard (chairman of the Committee of Visitors and, as of the Annual Meeting, a new trustee), and his children, Paul Byard and Margaret Stearns, decided to use part of the fund to restore and frame this 1846 lithograph that was badly in need of conservation.

Entitled "Origin of Steam

Navigation," by John Hutchings, the purpose of this lithograph was to fortify the claim of one John Fitch to having launched his own steamboat invention on the Collect Pond in 1797 or 1798—before Robert Fulton's 1807 claim. In the controversy, Fitch alleged that Fulton and his partner Robert Livingston (a Library trustee who made a great deal of money on the steamboat patent) owed their success to Fitch, who clearly wanted a piece of the action.

The Byard family hopes to renovate additional archival material with the Spencer Byard Fund. They have their eye on a series of architectural drawings for a building the Library occupied in the early 19th century.





## THE WALLET

BARBARA H. STANTON

DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE CHAIR

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 fund raising endeavors? Currently, the Library is asking that two wallets be provisioned at the same time: for the Annual Appeal and for the 1993-95 Capital Campaign.

From the Annual Appeal, the Library hopes to draw roughly 10 percent of each year's operating budget. Since November, this wallet has been filling up at a gratifying rate. As of the end of April, 545 member/donors have given \$72,710, the highest total to date in three years. This bodes well to provide for the approximately 3000 new titles we buy annually.

A separate grant of \$30,000 over three years from the Lila Wallace-Reader's

The New York Society Library, located at 53 East 79th Street, was founded in 1754 by a civic-minded group, the New York Society, which was formed in the belief that the availability of books would help the city to prosper. A private subscription library (a family membership is \$125 for the year), it now contains over 200,000 volumes. Members can take books out or they can use the reading and study rooms on upper floors; they can also browse in the stacks. The public is invited to use the ground floor for reading and reference. In the summer, the Library will be open every Saturday in June and closed every Saturday from July 2 through September 3. Between these dates the Library will open every Monday at 9:00 A.M. (instead of the usual 1:00 P.M.). Saturday hours resume on September 10. Naturally, we will observe July 4th and Labor Day, September 5. For more information, call 212-288-6900.

Digest Fund will allow the Library to develop a program exploring aspects of biography through a series of lectures and round tables with distinguished authors. This program is being developed with Geoffrey Ward, Library member, biographer, and writer of the prize-winning television series, "The Civil War."

The Capital Campaign wallet—to conserve, upgrade, and house our collection—also is filling up in a heart-warming manner. Capital contributions and pledges total nearly \$620,000. Of this roughly \$250,000 has come from the trustees and \$300,000 from members. In addition, the Library has received two much-appreciated \$25,000 bequests, one from the estate of Phyllis Goodhart Gordan, a trustee for thirty-five years; the other from the estate of Irene Sharaff. Also much appreciated are a \$15,000 grant from the Achelis Foundation for the retrospective conversion of our Children's Collection and a \$5,000 grant from the Gladys Kriebel Delmas Foundation for conservation and computerization.

We are now turning to a number of other foundations and to Federal and State funding sources. We have just submitted a joint application with the Mercantile Library Association of New York to the National Endowment for the Humanities for on-line cataloguing of the 10,000 works of 19th century fiction in our two collections. If funded, this would be an undertaking of national importance to scholars.

The Library gratefully thanks all those who are helping to provision our two equally important wallets (in their present sense of "a pocket-book for holding paper money without folding" originally U.S., 1845). Contributors' names will be listed in full in the next *Annual Report*.

## THE LIBRARY'S FIRST BOOKPLATE (1758)

This plate is armorial in form, but presents no real arms. The central frame, of Chippendale design, contains four quarterings that represent: Astronomy; Navigation, Geography, and Mathematics; Literature; and Religion. Mercury and Minerva support the frame, standing upon the ribbon which bears the Library's name; above the frame sits Apollo with his broad back to the full-shining sun; clouds which resemble toy balloons rise about him. Beneath the frame appears an idealized version of New York City with, directly underneath, the Greek letters for "Athens" (presumably to suggest that the city was the modern Athens); an open book bears across its face the motto, *Nosce teipsum* ("Know thyself") and a closed chest with a lighted candle on it bears the words, *sed in candelabro* ("but by candlelight").\* The bookplate is signed by E. Gallaudet.

\*If anyone could volunteer an attribution we would appreciate it.





## SHELF TALK

MARK PIEL, LIBRARIAN

The Library is taking steps towards establishing an automated circulation and book ordering system, which should vastly improve services to members and to the public. Inadequacies in our present operations are all too clear. Everyone who borrows books, whether new or older titles, is aware that the staff sometimes has difficulty knowing precisely where an individual book is. Is it signed out? Already flagged as missing? Being reordered? At the bindery? Or under the desk waiting for another's use? Members, as well as Library staff, would like to be able to say both how many volumes a member has out at a particu-

lar moment and when they are due for return—neither of which are we able to do now.

Under the proposed new system, the staff will know, without making internal office calls, what books are already on order and when they might arrive. Surely they will not have to write individual postcards about books being available—or overdue; nor file and pull book cards when a wand can be employed instead.

The Library's first step in this direction will be taken on May 30 when we begin an inventory of the collection. Inventory is the process of comparing what the Library thinks it owns with what is actually on the shelf. Results of a partial inventory in 1983-84 suggest that about 5 percent of the collection is permanent-

ly missing. The 1994-1995 inventory will allow us to correct the card catalogue so that it accurately reflects our holdings; give us the opportunity to replace missing volumes (or make substitutions); and, in the process, save the staff from useless searches. In a few years, bar code labels will link together the holding list and its corresponding volume. Inventory will be time-consuming and will inconvenience some, but the end results should be well worth the temporary aggravations.

A request for *volunteers*: The Library has received over 2,000 volumes as gifts. We need assistance in checking these fine editions in the humanities against our holdings. If anyone would like to volunteer, please contact me at 212-288-6900.

## PEOPLE AND EVENTS

### PROGRAMS

The Author/Member Lecture Series concluded on May 17 with a talk by *Mac Griswold*, garden writer, historian, and author with Eleanor C. Weller of *The Golden Age of American Gardens*. Mrs. Griswold spoke about the ideas and meanings that have connected women and gardens throughout Western history. *Maynard Solomon*, an independent scholar who lives in New York and is presently Visiting Professor of Music at Yale University, commenced the series with a talk on March 8 about Mozart and his use of the "adagio archetype" in such compositions as the A-minor Sonata and the Sonata in C Major. On April 19, *Allen Mandelbaum*, author of twelve volumes of verse translation and currently the W.R. Kenan, Jr. Professor of Humanities at Wake Forest University, mixed poetry and narrative in discussing the ancient poets' evolving expressions of love. The first two lectures were taped and are available to borrow.

Next fall the Library will initiate a three-part investigation of the art of biography, as mentioned above. This program, developed with Geoffrey Ward and funded by the Lila Wallace-Reader's Digest Fund, will be sponsored as well by the National Humanities Center, which will broadcast portions of it on their National Public Radio series "Soundings."

### AWARDS

At the Annual Meeting, historian *Walter Lord* was honored for over thirty years of service as a trustee. (The following day, he was awarded the Francis Parkman Prize for Special Achievement by the Society of American Historians in recognition of his lifetime dedication to American history.) He became a member of the Library in the mid fifties in order to do research on an account of the first fifteen years of the 20th century, *The Good Years*, which came out in 1960.

"Unlike other libraries, here I was completely free to rummage through the marvellous collection of bound volumes of old newspapers and out-of-print magazines like *McClures*, *Scribners*, and *World's Work*—sifting out predictions about the coming century." One of these,



Walter Lord

which he noted in his book, was that the 20th century would be a silent one, when "all the crash of horses' hoofs and the rumble of steel tires will be gone."

Mr. Lord again turned to the Library in writing about the Alamo, *A Time To Stand*, published in 1961. In the *New York Evening Post* on March 30, 1836, he found the City's first report of the fall of the Texas stronghold on February 24—almost a month after it happened in the pre-telegraph days when front-page news still relied on personal correspondence.

One of his most vivid memories dates from 1963, the year he became a trustee. He was introducing a 10-year-old boy to the Library when they heard the news that President Kennedy had been shot. "I immediately took him down to our newspapers. We spread the volume of the *New York Herald* for April 15, 1865, out on the big table in the basement and read about Lincoln's assassination almost a century before."

In his 31 years on the Board, Mr. Lord has concentrated on some of the non-book aspects of the collection, such as china, painting, sculpture, prints, and furniture. "Henry Cooper and I were the House Committee and congratulate ourselves on installing those beautiful glass doors on the cabinet shelves in the Members' Room to display especially fine pieces of



china. Henry and I also came up with the idea of hanging portraits of some of the Society's venerable patrons on the stairs."

As the Library moves into the 21st Century, "there will be changes," he predicts. "For one thing, we should have wheelchair access to the building to serve some of us who are getting on. But I see the Library as continuing to be a wonderful and vital community."

Also at the Annual Meeting, *Janet Howard* was honored for her thirty years of service to the Library. During her service, she has been involved in literally every aspect of the Library. She currently works in the cataloguing and circulation departments. The following are some remarks she prepared for *Library Notes*:

"I have been here at the Library for more



*Janet Howard*

than half my life and love it more and more as time goes on. I've seen many people come and go over the thirty years and have made some wonderful friends. Having worked full-time for twenty years, I now work part-time to be home with my daughter, Kristina, who is nine years old. She loves to come to the Library and browse. My husband, Bob, is a Court Officer with the New York City Court system. With my parents, he has helped take care of Kristina while I'm at work. I hope I'll be here for the next thirty years—well, not quite thirty years, but as many as possible."

#### NEW TRUSTEES

Three new trustees, Margaret Mather Byard, Robert A. Caro, and Jenny Lawrence, were elected at the Annual Meeting. *Margaret Mather Byard*, a literary historian, was born in Glasgow of Scottish parents, but her residence and education have been in the United States. She received her B.A. from Smith College and her Ph.D. from Columbia University and has taught at Douglass Rutgers and the School of General Studies at Columbia. Her publications follow her interests in 17th century arts, sciences, and literature. She remembers, in 1937, wheeling her oldest child in a perambulator to the Library's new site at 53 East 79th Street. She has been chair-

man and organizer of the Visitor's Committee since its inception in 1991.

*Robert A. Caro*, historian and biographer, was born in New York City and graduated from Princeton in 1957. He began professional life as a reporter on a New Jersey newspaper and later moved to *Newsday*. He became a Neiman fellow at Harvard in 1965-66. His biography, *The Power Broker: Robert Moses and the Fall of New York* (1974) won the Pulitzer Prize for Biography and the Francis Parkman prize of the Society of American Historians. He is presently working on the third volume of *The Years of Lyndon Johnson*. Mr. Caro is a board member and past president of the Authors Guild of America and a past vice president of PEN American Center.

*Jenny Lawrence* is the book review editor of *Natural History* magazine. She has lived in New York since 1969 and has been a Library member since 1970. A production editor in the college department of Harper & Row and St. Martin's Press until 1973, she then worked for five years at the New-York Historical Society on special projects, including the papers of Revolutionary War General Horatio Gates. A graduate of University of California at Berkeley, she recently received an M.A. in journalism from New York University.

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