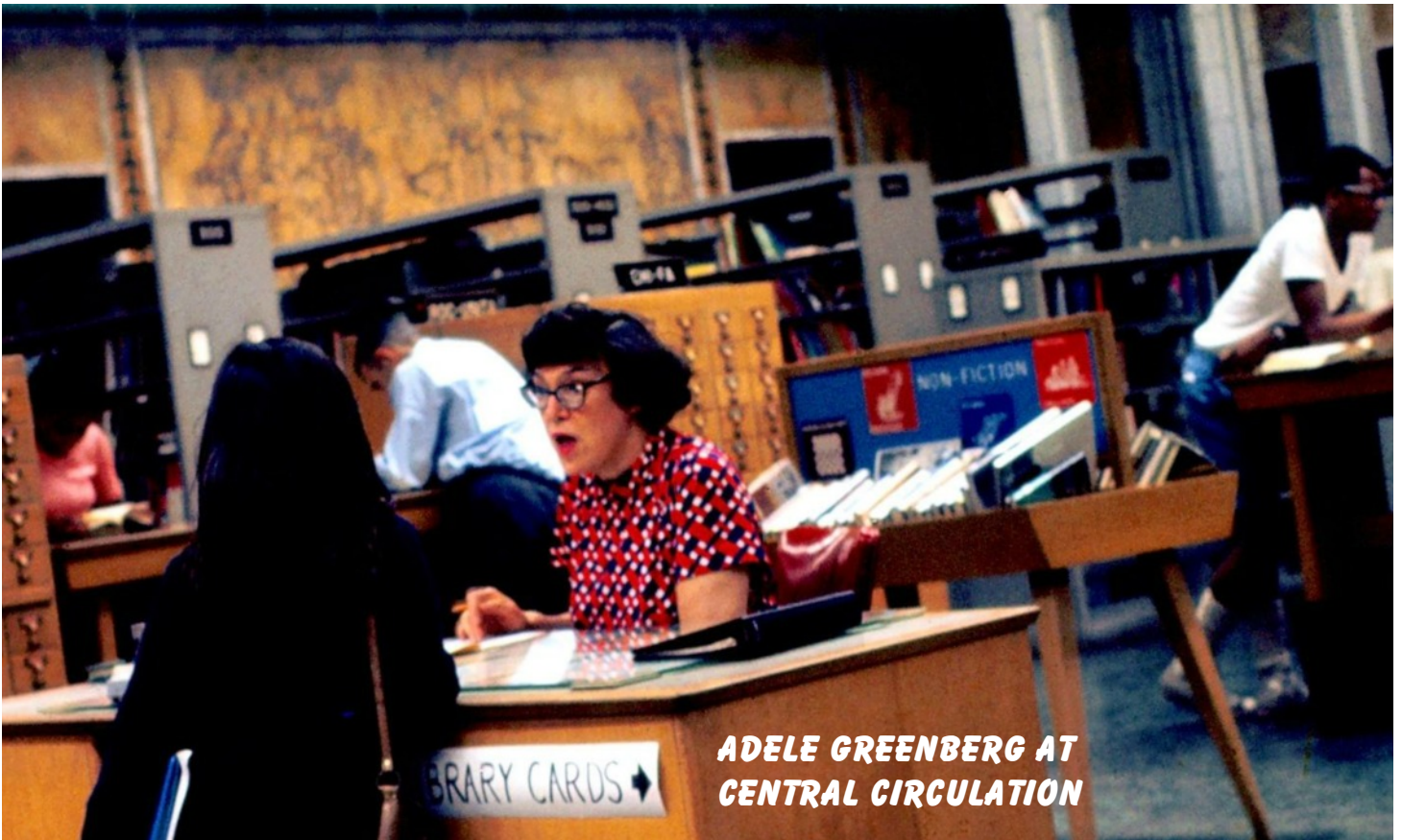


New York Public Library Retirees Association Newsletter

Winter 2018/2019

Issue 42

A MEMORY OF CENTRAL CIRCULATION



**ADELE GREENBERG AT
CENTRAL CIRCULATION**

By Alan Pally

I began my NYPL career in 1967, as a page at the Donnell Library, working 20 hours a week and earning \$1.60 (later \$1.75) per hour. Once a month (or was it every two weeks?) I was sent down to the Payroll Office in the Central Building to pick up the checks for the Donnell staff. I was given bus fare (twenty cents each way) but kept the forty cents and walked from 53rd Street to 42nd Street and back. I justified that by the fact that the bus would have taken longer than walking, wasting precious library page time.

I enjoyed making that journey, partly because having that little bit of business in the glorious Central Building instilled in me a sense of awe for the great institution that I, still a teenager, had recently become part of. And so I was thrilled when, after seven months at Donnell, I was informed by Supervising Librarian William Caldwell that I was being promoted to the position of clerk, half-time, at Central Circulation (CC), which was in Room 80 of the Central Building. The annual full-time salary for the position was \$4,325.

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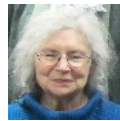
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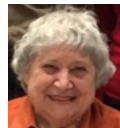
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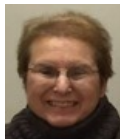
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PRESIDENT'S NOTES

Greetings!

Since the old Mid-Manhattan Library building on Fifth Avenue and 40th Street closed for complete renovation, we have not had a general membership meeting; it's been quite a while. However, Mid-Manhattan Library still exists across Fifth Avenue, but we were not alert to it. But there it is, a lovely lending library located in Room 78 of the Schwarzman building just off the 42nd Street entrance. They even have a great auditorium or meeting space for up to 60 people. It was available to us, and it was a perfect meeting space for our exceptional guest speaker, Bob Sink, Archivist, Historian, and Retiree, to give his wonderful program entitled "Silence and Acceptance: Lesbian Experience in the Circulation Department of the NYPL, 1901- 1950."

Our Board, Committee Chairs, Newsletter Editor, and I wish you a very Happy and Healthy New Year! Do keep in touch as we all love to hear from YOU!

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WELCOME NEW MEMBERS

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IN MEMORY OF NYPLRA MEMBERS

Angeline Moscatt
Elaine Thomas

A MEMORY OF CENTRAL CIRCULATION

(Continued)

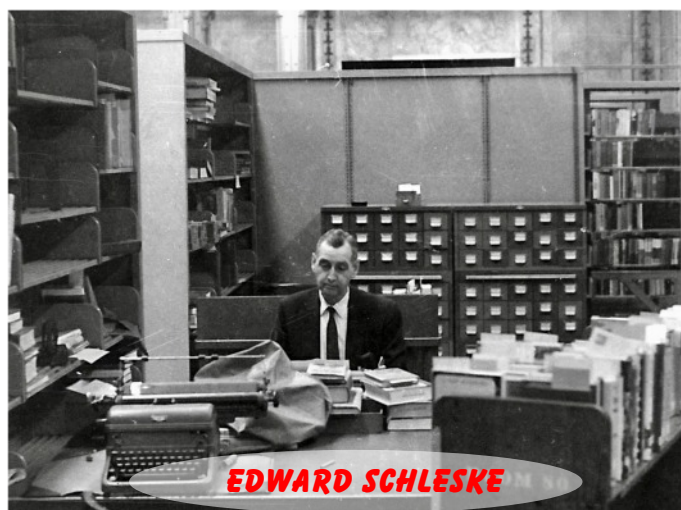
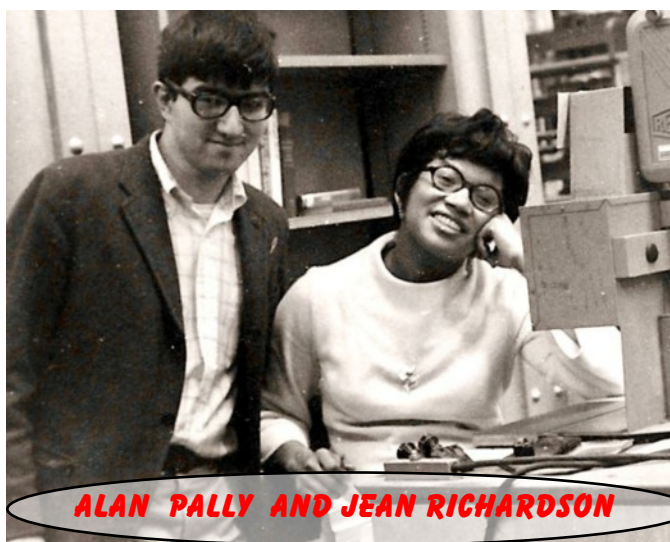
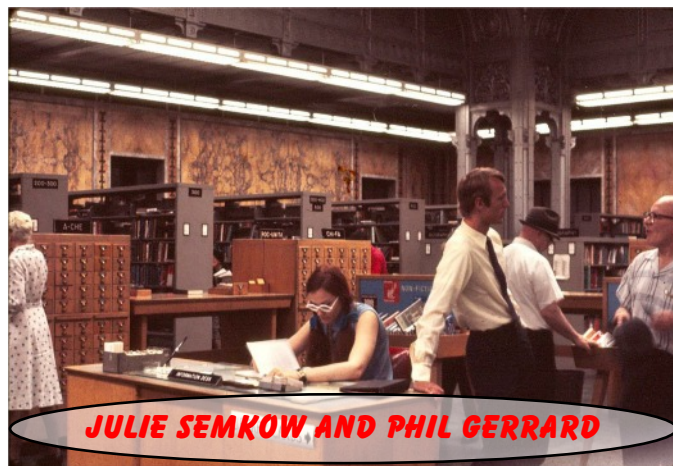
The New York Public Library's 42nd Street building opened in 1911, and Central Circulation opened with it, as did the Central Children's Room, also on the ground floor of the new building. In those days, both departments were supported with corporate funds. In her monumental work, *The New York Public Library: A History of Its Early Years*, Phyllis Dain reported that John Shaw Billings, NYPL's first Director, chose the CC collection himself, wanting the books to be "on a higher level than the branch collections and suitable for transfer to the Reference Department." Dain further reported that "During its first full year of operation, 1912, Central Circulation jumped to third place in volume of circulation among all the branches in the Circulation Department." She also reported that an NYPL annual report for the period boasted that circulation was of high quality, since it was comprised of forty-seven per cent fiction, which was a low proportion for public libraries. CC soon became the busiest branch in the NYPL system, "serving a varied and sophisticated clientele." On May 1, 1968, I began serving that clientele.

Walking into CC on that beautiful spring day, I was struck by how different CC was from Donnell. Donnell was formal; CC was easygoing. One of the first new colleagues that I met was Faye Simkin, the Principal Librarian in charge of CC. She was reading a book truck for reserves. Faye was warm and welcoming, and I liked her immediately. She introduced me to my supervisor, senior clerk Jean Richardson, who gave me a tour of the other branch units in the building: the Children's Library, which was run by Supervising Librarian Angeline Moscatt and Senior Librarian Mary

Stuart McCullen; the Picture Collection, run by Principal Librarian Lenore Cowan; and the Readers Advisors Office, which supervised the nearby Inquiry Desk on the main floor of the building, opposite the Fifth Avenue entrance. NYPL's Personnel Office was behind the Inquiry Desk. (Today, the Gottesman Gallery occupies much of that space.) The Readers Advisors Office reported to CC; CC reported to the Manhattan Borough Office, which was in the Donnell Building.

When I arrived at CC, the branch was open to the public eighty-two hours a week: 9am-10pm Monday-Saturday; and 2-6 on Sunday. The night shift was 2-10, requiring a librarian and two clerks. I generally worked Wednesday nights but had to take my turn, every few months, to work Saturdays 2-10. We signed up to work Sundays, for which we got paid time-and-a-half. CC was open certain holidays as well.

Our large staff included Faye Simkin (Principal Librarian); Phil Gerrard (Supervising First Assistant); senior librarians Edward Schleske and Peggy Kelly; and many beginning librarians. There were three senior



clerks, who, in addition to supervising the large clerical staff, had behind the scenes responsibilities: Theresa Brianzi (who dealt with the money), Jean Richardson (overdues), and Cathy Ryan (pages). (Theresa Brianzi's brother, Albert, had once worked for NYPL. His war service was noted on a plaque on the wall in the old mezzanine lounge. That honor roll plaque is now in a more visible place, outside the Gottesman Gallery.) There was a senior stenographer, Nora McMahon, who began her career at Central Circulation in the 1920s. Nora would regale us with stories of the old days, including the war years. The many clerks at Central Circulation included Iris Pettiford Cox, Margaret Kruh, Renee Flesh, Lyle Wachovsky, Ronald Rinke, Richard Sundack, Vinnie Longobardo, and many others. A clerk named Shirley used to chain smoke at the charge desk when she worked at night. A clerk named Martha had been to charm school, or so it was said. Martha never seemed to speak. We thought maybe that was the secret of her charm. A clerk named Rocco, who was experienced in such matters, would step on the occasional mouse. I became friends with a clerk named Patrick, who wanted to grow a moustache but couldn't. One lunch hour I accompanied him down to Orbach's on 34th Street because he heard that they sold false moustaches. He tried on a few but wasn't satisfied with any of them. Patrick, recently out of the U.S. Navy, had a wicked sense of humor. Iris Pettiford Cox always insisted that any reference to her name must include the Pettiford. When someone phoned her (Patrick answered the phone) asking for Iris Cox, Patrick replied, "We have no Irish cops here."



The Readers Advisors Office (RA), which reported to CC, was run by Supervising Librarian Adele Greenberg. Her staff included Robert Stenzel, Catherine Halls, Jeanette Bland (later Brown), and Minna Wittmer (Minna worked at the Inquiry Desk). Tillie Frank became the Information Assistant at the Inquiry Desk in late 1968. After RA moved to Mid-Manhattan, the Inquiry Desk was administered by the General Research Division. Adele Greenberg occasionally worked at the information desk in CC.



Central Circulation was an extremely busy branch in the late 1960s. The public began streaming in at 9am and reached a peak of intensity at lunchtime when it was necessary to schedule three clerks at the Registration Desk in order to register the hordes of applicants for library cards. The application process

was more complicated in those days, requiring a reference. The nights were not so crowded, though we often had an influx of readers who had finished their shopping at Stern's Department Store, which was across 42nd Street. The collections were varied, still including a large, somewhat esoteric non-fiction collection, which was great for browsing, and an excellent fiction section. (I wonder how many of those books had been on the shelves since the days of Mr. Billings.) The collection was constantly being augmented with new titles. There were two-week books and pay duplicates as well. We did not enjoy the personal connections with the public that I would later experience at Yorkville and Lincoln Center. Everyone was always in a rush. I worked the three clerical desks (charging, registrations/reserves, and returns). My behind-the-scenes task was related to overdues. I became obsessed with a thing called the "straggler list," which was an early computer-generated list of numbers related to overdue books.

There was no air conditioning, and the summer of 1968 was hot! We often went on "heat time," when some of the staff would be sent home while the remaining staff would collect comp time for the time worked. Sometimes, when it was really boiling, we'd collect double-time comp time, rather than just time-and-a-half. Once it was so hot that Miss Eaton, the Coordinator of Manhattan Branches, came down to CC and personally closed the branch, sending us home. The high-vaulted ceiling of CC retained the heat, making it difficult for Room 80 to cool down even when the heat abated a bit outside. One of the few rooms in the Central Building that was air conditioned in those days was the Purchasing/Supply Office, at the other end of the ground floor.

A great benefit of working in the Central Building was easy access to the Research Library departments. I had just begun studying Theology (History of Religion) in college and particularly enjoyed doing research in the Oriental Division reading room. It was presided over by Assistant Librarian Francis Paar, a quietly impressive scholarly gentleman.

But the proximity to the Research departments offered more prosaic benefits. While I was lost in reveries, poring over the *Sacred Books of the East* (particularly the volumes dedicated to the *Zend Avesta*), a CC clerk by the name of Elsie Steinberg was spending her breaks in the Economics Division. Upon returning from one of her breaks, Mrs. Steinberg said to me,



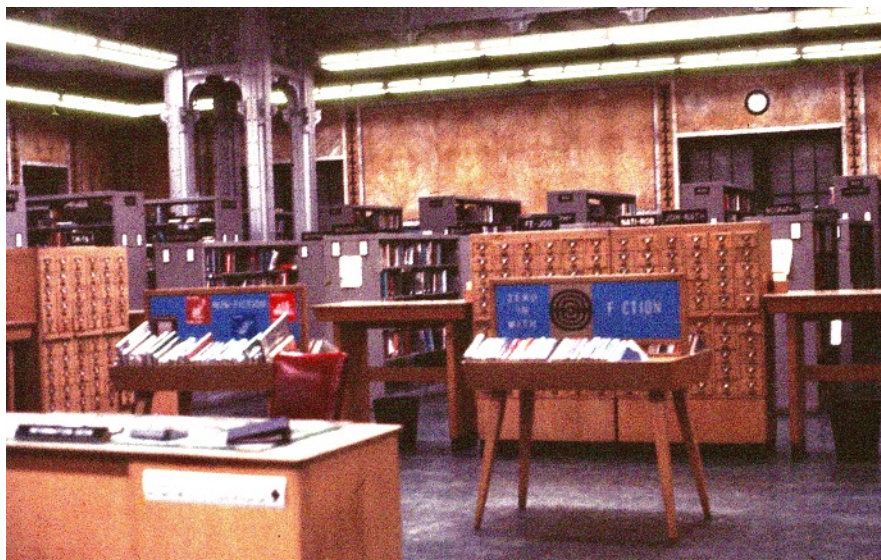
"Buy stock in Scientific Data Systems." Well, I had never owned stock, but I had some extra money, because I was still living at home. I phoned my uncle, who had a broker, and told him I wanted to invest \$600 in the stock that Mrs. Steinberg recommended. My uncle phoned his broker, then got back to me and told me I was crazy, why did I want to throw my money away? But I insisted, Uncle Dave bought the stock for me, and shortly after that, the company was taken over by Xerox. My \$600 quadrupled and paid for my first two trips to Europe, all because Mrs. Steinberg took her breaks a couple of flights up in the Economics Division! She left NYPL shortly after that, not because she became independently wealthy but because she applied for the Senior Clerk Seminar and was rejected. She had only one branch experience, Central Circulation, and the ironclad rule was that, to be accepted into the Seminar, you needed two. Faye Simkin tried to intercede for her, but to no avail. So Mrs. Steinberg left NYPL for a better-paying job in the CUNY library.

Lunch and dinner times offered enjoyable opportunities for socializing with colleagues, and there were a lot of affordable choices. In those days, the Central Building had a large staff cafeteria on the ground floor, run by Globe Food Services. It was managed by a man named Frank, who was from Central Europe. Frank introduced me to red cabbage, one of his specialties. There were hot meals, as well as

sandwiches and salads. Jenny, a woman from Poland who made the sandwiches, later became a Library employee. The large inner room, which looked out onto the parking lot, was called the cottage. I enjoyed many breaks and lunches there with my CC colleagues as well as staff from other departments. Mostly through Nora and Theresa, I met Ed Di Roma, Meta Myers, Bridie Race, and many other non-CC staff. Sometimes Betty Arnold, the Personnel Rep who had hired me, would join us, as would Dorothy Eosefow, who had also been complicit in my hiring as a page at Donnell. (Dorothy had left Donnell by that time and joined the staff that was planning Mid-Manhattan.) There was a real camaraderie in the building. Former CC staff would occasionally come back to have lunch with us, e.g. Adelaide O'Neill (later Keller), who had left CC to become head of Central Registration, which was at the Annex; and Mary C. Hatch, Faye's predecessor as head of CC, who had become Coordinator of Mid-Manhattan, which was in the planning stages. (Sadly, Miss Hatch died in June, 1970, four months before Mid-Manhattan opened).

There were many affordable restaurants nearby: three Automats along 42nd Street; the Mayflower, Kress's Cafeteria, and our regular Wednesday dinner hour venue, Bickford's Restaurant on 43rd Street. Bickford's had authentic strawberry shortcake, which we often had for dessert. Occasionally, a group of us would go to Pak-India for lunch. That was my introduction to South Asian food. Another pleasant option was to take your lunch into Bryant Park, which in the late 1960s was still a safe and comfortable space. There were often lunchtime poetry readings. I remember one featuring Marianne Moore.

In the autumn of 1968, I applied for an LTA position in the Science & Technology Division, which was one flight up from CC. I got the job and began working there on December 2, 1968, at an annual salary of \$4,900. I continued to sign up to work at CC on Sundays, but the department was already changing. Staff began to leave, partly I think because they dreaded being subsumed into the new Mid-Manhattan structure. Faye Simkin became head of one of the Metro units in the Central Building and was replaced by Robert Goldstein. The three senior clerks left. Cathy



Ryan took a part-time job in the Bronx Borough Office and went back to college. My wonderful supervisor, Jean Richardson, left NYPL for another job. Theresa Brianzi, along with Nora McMahon, both the doyennes of Central Circulation, retired in the summer of 1970. Just about all the beginning librarians left around that time. I think the only one who remained with NYPL was Patricia Peeples, who enjoyed a long career in neighborhood branches. Others, like Donna Abbaticchio, would join the CC staff after I left, and some of them, like Donna, would have lengthy productive careers in the Library. Mid-Manhattan opened in the autumn of 1970. CC was subsumed, becoming Language and Literature and the Popular Library. The Children's Room moved to Donnell. The old life of Central Circulation was over.

Around the time of my retirement (2010), there was quite a controversy about a plan to return a lending library to the Central Building, which had become a hallowed research-only building. I didn't understand what all the fuss was about. From 1911 to the 1970s, there were circulating library units in the Central Building, posing no particular problems. Today, there is once again a Children's Library as well as temporary quarters for the Mid-Manhattan Library on the ground floor of what is now called the Schwarzman Building. I think my old colleagues from Central Circulation, many of whom are long gone, would approve. But I'm sure they would be amused that our sweet old branch, designed and stocked with such care by John Shaw Billings in the early 20th Century, is now the Celeste Bartos Forum, one of the most fashionable party spaces in New York City.

TOUR OF WNET

Thanks to our Program Committee Chairperson, Estelle Friedman, two groups of NYPLRA members toured WNET on December 11, 2018.

Among the intriguing facts we learned is that shows are sent by internet to the master control in Syracuse. Another fact is that commercial television presents only eighteen minutes of content during a half-hour program, while a PBS show runs twenty-six minutes and forty-six seconds.

Robotic cameras are used. They are set up initially by people and then moved by the person in the control room.

In the past, PBS shows were taped, and the tapes are now being archived.

We entered a small room where a genial freelance editor named Darren Freeman explained to us how he edits a program by making many cuts in the original to make it more visually interesting.

Then we learned from Jonathan Bergman, who enthusiastically deals with sound, that there is a music and sound library on the premises that he uses. Some recorded sounds are from nature while others are created artificially.

Using Pro Tools on a computer console, Jon mixes stereo and surround-sound at once. Adding voiceovers and narration is part of his job. Also, he eliminates unwanted sound. For example, if a camera were positioned in a helicopter, he would eliminate the helicopter noise. Cameras are at times carried on drones, which are silent. This is a plus for nature photography since animals don't run, frightened by noise.

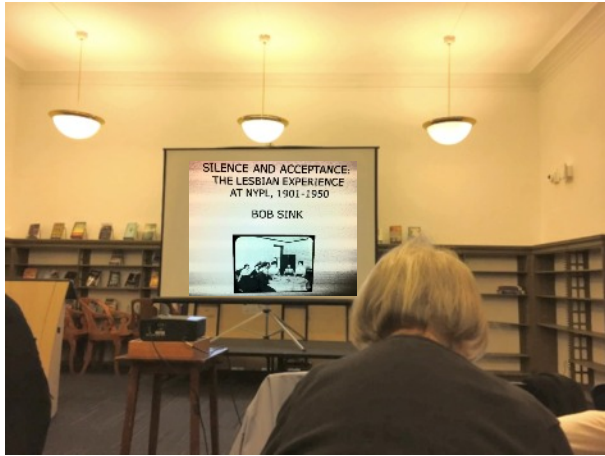
If you missed our tours and are available on Tuesdays, you may make a reservation to join a group of 10 for a tour. Tours are given on Tuesdays at 11 a.m. and 1:30 p.m. To reserve your place, go to tours@thirteen.org or phone (212) 560-2711.

If you are interested in finding out when your favorite programs will be shown on TV, you may call Member and Viewer Relations at (212) 569-2888 or go online to www.thirteen.org.



**NYPLRA GENERAL MEETING
NOVEMBER 9, 2018**

After brief opening comments by President Becky Koppelman, Guest Speaker Bob Sink gave a fascinating PowerPoint presentation on his research examining the sexual identities of the women working in The New York Public Library branch system in the first half of the 20th century. Using feminist Adrienne Rich's notion of the "lesbian continuum," he has been documenting personal aspects of their lives to ascertain how many would fit this description. Bob hopes that his study will show that historians can breach the silence about sexual identity that existed before the LGBTQ civil rights era. The information in this talk will be part of a book he is writing based on his research about the branch librarians of The New York Public Library during the first 50 years of the Circulation Department, 1901-1950.



Bob Sink and Becky Koppelman

DOLORES RANDALL

By Polly Bookhout

I wonder how many NYPL librarians remember the adventuresome, free spirit Dolores Randall.

Dolores and I met in the mid-1960s when we were young and working at Tompkins Square Branch Library. Alice Alexander was the branch librarian; Tom Dickinson was, for a time, the reference librarian; Judy Brill, the YA librarian; and I was the children's librarian. This was a time when the East Village attracted young college graduates without much money who were trying to decide what they should do with their lives. On Avenue B, Dolores and I would get buns at Miss Sophie's Ukrainian bakery, then cross the street for sliced pork at a Polish butcher's. On break, we would have pecan pie at Grits and Eggs. It was a magical time before the publicized murder of a young suburbanite made the East Village scary.

Dolores grew up in Florida in a time and place where African-Americans couldn't go to the public library. She was in school with Ada Jackson, a prize student, who rang the school bell. Dolores went to live with an aunt in Detroit when her mother died and her father couldn't raise her by himself.

Dolores had a pattern of working for a year or two, then leaving to backpack around the world with a friend from California. She once spent four years traveling, visiting Europe, Morocco, and Nepal.

She was briefly the branch librarian of 115th Street. This was not a good fit; she didn't stay long. She returned to her aunt and worked for the Detroit Public Library in a special federal project for outreach to Mexican-Americans. She and her fellow workers got pink slips after a year. While in Detroit, she took sewing lessons from an Armenian woman. Her sewing skills were so advanced that she would later do volunteer repair work for the Metropolitan Museum's fashion department.

Some time after the budget crisis of 1975, she returned to work at the Grand Concourse Branch Library as a CETA worker. Before the CETA workers were hired, there were only two librarians, Bonnie Williams, the branch librarian, and me, the children's librarian/first assistant. If we were lucky,

we might get a librarian for the day from the South Central Region. Having CETA workers felt almost luxurious. I remember meeting Dolores in Riverside Park to spend the day after the blackout of July 1977. Dolores worked a year at Grand Concourse Library and another at the Kingsbridge Library, before becoming unemployed.

She wanted to take an advanced knitting class and promised to knit me a sweater if I would buy the yarn for her. I did and still have the sweater, a cap, and a ball of wool. . She also made a Victorian blouse and skirt for me to wear to the seventy-fifth anniversary of the Columbus Branch Library.

She worked briefly for a second time for the Brooklyn Public Library. Then in 1988, she joined the Army library service in Germany. In 1991, she married a German, became a housewife, and, in 2002, the couple moved to a farm near Nuremberg. She was happy pursuing her crafts, but found learning German at a late age difficult.

We usually corresponded each year. She always asked about Rosemary Kinsey. We three had gone on house tours and to museums back in the 1970s. She was sorry to hear of her death. Dolores' husband died a couple of years back. This year, a friend of hers saw my name in Dolores' address book and wrote to tell me she had died peacefully on October 29, 2018.

MARJORIE MIR

I learned the basics of puppet-making in a workshop given by Marilyn Iarusso, and for the next ten years, in several branches and two library systems, thoroughly enjoyed all aspects of the presentations: script adaptations, props, scenery, sound effects, all of it. I was lucky to have staff members who were happy to join in the efforts. The play we presented most often was based on Pura Belpre's Puerto Rican folk tale, *Otí*. I tried to make the puppets resemble Paul Galdone's illustrations. My favorite, though, was an adaption of Ursula LeGuin's story, "Star Mother's Youngest Child," not least because one scene took place in a snowfall (Ivory Flakes.)



THE TROUPE

They are middle-aged by now,
the children who sat watching
them perform, and, although
the stage is long abandoned,
the actors have not aged:

Young heroes, the one who,
with a magic incantation
turned a devil into cornstarch smoke,
another who saved his brother
from drowning in a well,
Daniel, red-haired, cleft-chinned
who won a princess.
And others, the Wise Old Woman,
a green-faced witch, a shaggy dog.

All begun, Adam-like, from clay,
cast in paper, plaster, glue,
painted, costumed, given what life
two hands could master.
Most malleable of actors,
they moved against back-drops
of jungle, cottage, palace, once
tottered under soap-flake snow
to bring home a Christmas tree.

Still here, but immobile now.
Pliant as they ever were,
when their playwright, angel,
stage-hand, mainstay,
all-around creator, gave up the game,
like small tents, they folded.

Marjorie Mir

WASHINGTON HEIGHTS MEMOIR



Gracie Brainerd Krum, born in 1874, wrote her reminiscences of her girlhood visits to the Washington Heights Library in an unpublished manuscript *In Grandfather's House: Being her reminiscences of a girlhood in the Washington Heights section of New York City, 1874-1897*. Thanks to Bob Isaac who shared this with us, we can print this excerpt.

“In the late seventies and early eighties, Washington Heights had a subscription Library. Mother sometimes took me with her when we went to exchange books. It occupied a small room over the front end of the Mills hardware store on the northeast corner of 156th Street and Tenth Avenue (Amsterdam Avenue). I do not remember how it was entered but probably by the Stairway that led straight up from 156th Street at the rear of the building, and from there through the large room which made up the rest of the upper floor. I have some recollection of this room being used to house some of the books.

About the time I entered Public School there was an awakening of public interest in the library and this large room was fitted up as a Reading Room and thrown open to the public. In the southwest corner a large coal stove furnished heat, and there the librarian, Miss Price had her headquarters. I have no recollection of the charging system employed, but probably it was a ledger record. Miss Price spent a good deal of the time covering the books with heavy brown paper, lettering names of authors and titles on their backs. It was her pride to keep these covers clean and attractive. In those days this covering was felt to be a sanitary measure of importance. But this librarian of the old school was by no means a mere clerk. She knew her books. The warm corner where she sat was furnished, beside her table and chair, with a lounge and settee upholstered in dark green velvet, gifts from some of the wealthy patrons. This was a favorite spot of mine for a few minutes conversation with Miss Price as to what to read next. She was a charming woman, short and somewhat thick set, with bright dark

eyes and gray hair that lay in little natural curls all over her head.

...So several years went by, Miss Price having her own quiet place in the community. She must have lived on a salary, tiny even for those days. The Library probably was open awhile every evening, for she prepared her cup of tea and light supper in the little front room during the quiet supper hour. The Reading Room must have been closed for an hour or so at noon for then she went out to lunch, which was really her dinner. There were several homes in Audubon Park where she was welcomed on regular days of the week, and there were others in the village where she went occasionally. Ours was one of these. Grandmother said Miss Price never came at the wrong time. She was a delightful guest, eating with relish the plain wholesome food that was served, bright and witty in conversation, bringing no unpleasant gossip and leaving behind her the feeling that she carried none away...”

WASHINGTON HEIGHTS 150TH ANNIVERSARY PROGRAM

On Saturday, September 29, 2018, in celebration of Washington Heights' 150th year of library service (an NYPL branch since 1914), a lively panel discussion was held. The participants, all of whom live in the neighborhood, were (left to right) Karen Taylor www.whilewearestillhere.org; historian Eric K. Washington; moderator Jonathan Bassett; Priscilla Bassett, former NYPL children's librarian and Jonathan's mother; and Maira Liriano, Associate Chief Librarian of the Schomburg Center.



Photo courtesy of Louise Crowley

Ms. Taylor began the program with a description of two buildings on Edgecombe Avenue that were the hub of intellectual and artistic life in Washington Heights in the 1940s. 555 Edgecombe, the more artistic of the two, was home to Count Basie, Duke Ellington, Coleman Hawkins, Paul Robeson, and Lena Horne, among others. 409 Edgecombe housed more of the intellectual members of the community, including Thurgood Marshall and W.E.B. DuBois. [Our own Pura Belpré lived there with her husband, composer and violinist Clarence Cameron White.]. You can learn more about these Sugar Hill buildings both on Ms. Taylor's website and in her film, *While We Are Still Here*.

Mr. Washington spoke about the history of the neighborhood, calling it a cultural nexus, layered and complex, with two rivers and several parks in the vicinity. The Polo Grounds, beloved and remembered by many, used to be nearby. Among cultural institutions in the area are Audubon Terrace, one of the oldest cultural complexes in American; the Morris-Jumel Mansion; and Trinity Church Cemetery. Mr. Washington leads walking tours of the area (www.ekwashington.com).

Ms. Liriano spoke primarily about the Green Book, which began as an annual guidebook for African-American motorists to help navigate the segregated places that existed from the 30s to the 50s, the Jim Crow era. Victor H. Green, who lived with his wife Alma at 580 St. Nicholas Avenue, first developed the book as a local guide but soon expanded its coverage to the entire country. It identified places that would welcome blacks: hotels, restaurants, bars, gas stations, and other businesses. The books have been digitized at Schomburg. There is a movie, currently in release, *The Green Book*, that depicts the story of a black pianist traveling through the south and using the Green Book to navigate.

Mrs. Bassett reminisced about her time both in the neighborhood and at the library. She has lived there, with only a

brief sojourn in Ohio, for many years. She began at Washington Heights when Regina Andrews, the first black branch librarian, was in charge. She returned many years later, after assignments at other branches, and oversaw the building of the Spanish-language children's collection.

After the program closed, branch manager Vianela Rivas led many of us Retirees Association members and neighborhood residents on a tour of the branch, a Carnegie library that has been completely and beautifully renovated. It makes great use of the bones of the Carrère and Hastings building while updating it for 21st Century needs.



The Washington Heights branch building



The modernized interior

**REMEMBERING THE BOHEMIAN
(CZECHOSLOVAK) PEOPLE'S PALACE*
EDWARD KASINEC**

By Way of Introduction

This evening's talk began for me quite innocently by a visit to the Webster Branch, NYPL, several months ago and a chance encounter with Alexandria Abensohn, the Branch Manager. Her enthusiasm for the past of this venerable branch and its neighborhood history was infectious and set me off on series of reflections, ruminations, and remembrances about my family's past, adolescent years in Yorkville's "Little Bohemia," and lifelong intersections with Czech, Slovak, and Carpatho-Rusyn culture at Harvard, Berkeley, NYPL, and now the Hoover Institution.

In addition to taking place in the very space of the former Czechoslovak Department (now the Webster community room and unrecognizable because of its 2001 reconstruction) today's remarks coincide with the centenary of the proclamation of Czechoslovak statehood here in America a century ago, and the seventieth anniversary of the 1948 Communist coup in Czechoslovakia.

The Community

Czechs and Slovaks began to emigrate to New York City in the late 19th century. This immigration wave came as a result of economic deprivations in the homelands, the Revolution of 1848, and the oppressive minority policies of Imperial Austro-Hungarian Interior Ministry. These early immigrants evinced a natural desire to be with their "kin and kind," founding fraternal and sports associations, churches, bars, and restaurants. They first clustered in the heavily Slavic (Polish, Ruthenian-Ukrainian) and Russian Jewish neighborhood of the Lower East Side in southeastern Manhattan. By the beginning of the 20th century however, Czechs and Slovaks began to move north, to the part of upper East Side area called Yorkville or "Little Bohemia." ** Many Czechs earned their livelihood in New York through brewing hops and in the production of pearl buttons and clothing, metalworking, and cigar-rolling and manufacture. As the advertisements in the community commemorative books attest, Czechs and Slovaks were also renowned as skilled craftsmen, medical professionals, and small business owners. A number of community religious and social institutions were founded in succession: the Sokol athletic organization on East 71st Street (founded 1867); the Protestant Hussite Church of Jan Hus on

East 74th (1877); the Lenox Hill Settlement House (1894); and, in 1896, The Bohemian National Hall, built on 322-23 East 73rd Street under the patriotic motto "Each Nation Unto Itself" [*Národ Sobě*].

From the 1870s on, dozens of Czech and Slovak periodicals and newspapers were published, perhaps the most long-lived being *New Yorské Listy* [available at NYPL Research Libraries, 1886-1965] and the widely read *Denník* [at NYPL Research, 1913-1961]. By the beginning of the 20th century, Czech and Slovak New York numbered about 50,000 with 1,500 pupils of Czech, Slovak, and Carpatho-Rusyn origin attending the community ethnic schools as well as New York City public schools numbered 82, 166, and 167. These community social and educational resources were further enhanced by the creation of a Palace for the People, the Webster Free Library, later the renowned Bohemian Webster Branch.

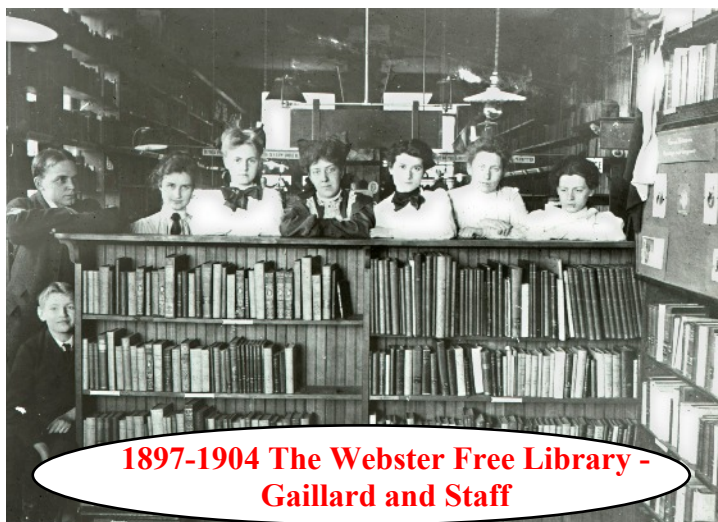
The Bohemian (Czechoslovak) People's Palace.

The Webster (or, popularly, "Bohemian") Branch of the New York Public Library traces its origins to the "Webster Free Library," founded by the East Side

House Settlement at 540 East 76th Street, then on the East River, itself founded in 1891. *** Edwin W. Gaillard (d. New York, 1928), an ardent admirer of Czech and Slovak culture and sport was appointed head in 1894. Rising costs and curtailments in City funds eventually



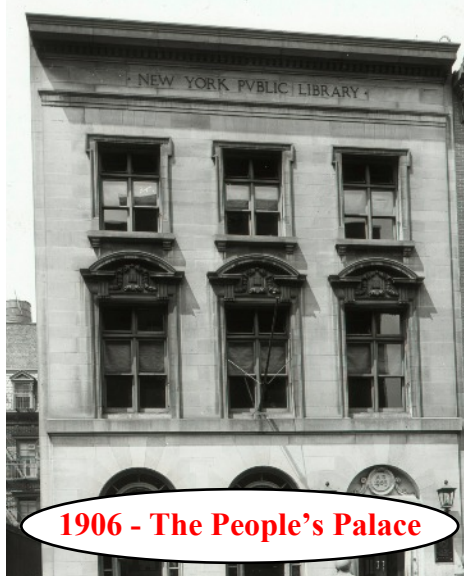
forced the Settlement House to ask the nascent New York Public Library to absorb the work of the Free Library and the then small Czech and Slovak language collection. This consolidation took effect on January 1, 1904, with the understanding that NYPL would construct a new library with funds drawn from Carnegie's princely gift. Moral and some limited



1897-1904 The Webster Free Library - Gaillard and Staff

financial support also came from the community itself including attorney, historian, and progressive leader Thomas Capek (d. New York City, 1950), newspaper editor Karel Leitner (dates?), and book designer Rudolf Ruzicka (d. Vermont, 1978), among others.

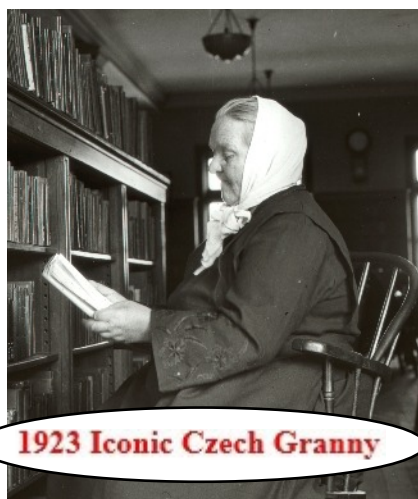
The NYPL Administration then headed by John Shaw Billings, M.D. (d. New York City, 1913) identified a site a three blocks from the Webster Free Library, and in January 1905, the City of New York purchased the vacant land from a Ms. Marie Alice Haag for \$15,000.



1906 - The People's Palace

Carnegie's personal architectural firm of Babb, Cook & Willard was selected as architects, and they designed a classical three-story limestone building (with a labyrinthine basement) in the city-estate style. Construction costs totaled \$73,763. Opening exercises for the new building, located at 78th Street and Avenue A, were held on October 24, 1906, and soon thereafter books began to circulate. (The magnificent Carrère and Hastings main building of the NYPL at Fifth and 42nd Street was opened only five years later!). Zaidee C. Griffin (d. 1948) was appointed Branch Librarian and served in this capacity more than thirty-three years, with Ms. Marie Oktavec (dates?) and later Pani Lida Matulka (d.1985,

Waterbury, Conn.), wife of the modernist painter, Jan Matulka (d. New York, 1972) serving as Griffin's Czechoslovak foreign language specialists. Under the guidance of Griffin and Matulka, the Webster Branch dramatically expanded its community library service by creating a Czechoslovak Department on the third floor of the building. By the beginning of World War I, the collection exceeded over 14,000 volumes and included historical imprints from the late 16th century!



1923 Iconic Czech Granny

The Czechoslovak Department also hosted many cultural programs for the community, including a Slavia Club that presented lectures and events that included the music of Frantisek Ondrecek (d. Milan 1922), recitals by pianist Rudolf Firkusny (d. Staatsburg, NY,

1994), and English-language classes taught by YMCA staff. For more than half a century, Czech books and programs were considered the core service of the branch, and it attracted prominent users from across the city and beyond, among them historian Otakar Odlozilik (d. Philadelphia, 1973), linguist Roman O. Jakobson (d. Cambridge, 1982), screen writer and novelist Marcia Davenport (d. New York, 1996), and the Princeton theologian Josef Lukl Hromadka (d. Prague, 1969). The large reading rooms for reference and periodicals were decorated with vases of Bohemian red glass, a stage for popular puppet shows, and art by portraitist Rudolf Braun (d. Prague, 1940)



May 1926 Class Visit

and the renowned Czech modernist Max Svabinsky (d. Prague, 1963). These efforts and initiatives were so successful that in 1927 the Czechoslovak Consul General Novak presented the state Order of the White Lion to NYPL Directors Edwin Hatfield Anderson (d. Evanston, Ill., 1947) and Franklin F. Hopper (d. New York City, 1950), and to Zaidee Griffen for their work on behalf of the collection and community. After some disruptions during World War II (1939-45), the Czech and Slovak collection was strengthened through gifts and foreign book-buying trips by staff to book shops and libraries in Prague and Martin (in Slovakia).

Pulling Down the Shades

By the mid-1950s, Yorkville had begun to gentrify, and the patrons of the Czechoslovak collections began to dwindle. In 1957, most circulating foreign language collections of NYPL, including Webster's Czech and Slovak books, were consolidated at the newly created Donnell Library Center on West 53rd Street. The rich Webster research collection of Czech and Slovak music scores was transferred to the Music Library in the main building, and are now live at PARC Lincoln Center. In subsequent decades, the demographics and socio-economic composition of the Upper East Side changed even more dramatically, and the Webster Branch shifted its focus to serve the library needs of an ever more diverse and affluent user community.

Final Thought

For more than half a century, the Bohemian (Czechoslovak) branch provided a social space, an agora in which several generations of immigrants (and their children like myself) found both mediation to the new world as well as reminders and links (unique books, artifacts, newspapers) to the Old Country, the *staryi kraj*. This remarkable public-community initiative was supported both materially and morally by the government of the First Czechoslovak Republic. The archival, visual, and print historical witness of "Little Bohemia" and its Webster's "people's palace" remain vital and speak even today to the issues in *Amerika's* present public (and political) discourse.

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****Excerpts from remarks delivered on October 3rd, 2018 in the space of the former Czechoslovak Division (now the third floor Community Room) of the Webster Branch, NYPL.***

The author expresses his thanks to Hee Gwone Yoo, Senior Librarian at General Research Division, SASB, NYPL; independent scholar-historian Dr. Martin Nekola, Prague; Dr. Nelli Shulov, Independent Scholar; Robert Sink, NYPL Archivist Emeritus; and the obliging staff of Manuscripts and Archives, The New York Public Library. The views expressed in these remarks are solely those of the author.

During the 1950s-60s, Kasinec, the son of Rusyn immigrants from Sub-Carpathian Rus' was reared in "Little Bohemia" and often frequented its three "people's palaces," 67th Street, Yorkville, and Webster. After holding positions at Harvard and UC Berkeley, he served for 25 years (1984-2009) as Curator for Slavic & East European collections for the Research Libraries, NYPL. His first publication (an exhibition checklist of rare Russica) appeared in the Bulletin of the New York Public Library in 1969. After retiring, he worked as staff consultant to two major NYPL exhibitions in 2010/11. He now serves as a Research Associate at Harriman Institute, Columbia University, and Visiting Fellow at Hoover Institution on War, Revolution and Peace, Stanford University.

*****The area between 59th and 86th Streets, between Avenue A (after 1928 renamed York Avenue in honor of the military hero, Sergeant Alvin York) and Second Avenues.***

Both the important composer Antonin Dvorak (d. Prague, 1904) and artist Alphonse Mucha (d. Prague, 1939) resided in New York for several years in the late 19th-early 20th centuries.

****** My remarks are based on the reports, correspondence, accession books, financial records, news clippings, and administrative files documenting the operations of Webster Branch that are held in the Manuscript and Archives Department, RG 8 5884, especially boxes 1-3, and 10-15; and the photographica in RG 10, boxes. 16 f. 1-3, 62 f. 8, Oversize, and 43 f. 15. Among the photographers who depicted Webster, its collections, and its readers were Aleksander Allad (d. 1989), Ilsa Hofman (Kraus), "LA Studios," H. Mallison, R.V. Smutny, and the renowned Lewis Hine...!***

NYPLRA ANNUAL LUNCHEON

On May 18, 2018, the association held its annual luncheon at Arte Café, a neighborhood favorite on the Upper West Side. After several years at La Mirabelle, another neighborhood favorite, the luncheon committee thought it would be nice to try something different; after all, variety is the spice of life! We had to find a restaurant that was both reasonably priced and had enough room for mingling, almost as important as having good food. Arte Café filled the bill.

A good time was had by all. The event was attended by around fifty members and their guests. In addition to the luncheon regulars, we were happy to see several first-timers, including Dalli Bacon, Dana Simon, Rita Bott, and Christine Coulombe. The menu choices for our group were varied and included an appetizer, entrée, dessert, and coffee or tea. There was a cash bar for those interested in a cocktail or some wine with their meal. Service was a little slow—since orders weren't taken in advance, food for fifty people had to be cooked all at once—but that gave us more time to visit with each other. Although it was a nice sunny day, it was a little too cool for us to take advantage of Arte's outdoor dining area. Maybe next year... If anyone has suggestions for restaurants that meet our criteria, please send the information to a member of the Luncheon Committee:

Larry Petterson (larry.petterson@icloud.com),
Joe Zeveloff (jlz44zev@aol.com),
Jane Kunstler (j.kunstler@att.net).

We're always looking for someplace new.



GEORGE AND BECKY KOPPELMAN



ERIK FALKENSTEEN, LARRY PETTERSON AND IRIS FORD



SHARON HYMAN AND MARCIA LOYD



MARCIA PURCELL AND BETH WLADIS



DALLI BACON AND JANE KUNSTLER



MARK MCCLUSKI AND FELIX MORALES



KAY CASSELL AND B. MACDONALD



BOB AND ADELE BELLINGER



MARY K. CONWELL AND MARGARET HETLEY

RETIREE NEWS

DAVID BEASLEY

I was glad to fly down from Ontario to Queens in May to help celebrate Local 1930's fiftieth anniversary, an event that was well organized by the present Local leadership. Michelle accompanied me. We had a good time. We stayed in Long Island City in a hotel that boasted views of Manhattan but found the views largely blocked by high-rises constructed in the past year or two--after the hotel advertised that distinction. Things were booming there.

The master of ceremonies named the past presidents with the years they served, but only two past presidents, Sally Campbell and I, were there. We were disappointed that more people from my time in the library were not there. We were told that notices went out rather later than expected. The event, nevertheless, was well attended, drinks and food plentiful, and our table companions sociable. I was happy to have a chat with the current president, Val Colon, and find that the Local is negotiating and prospering. New York City seemed more populated than I recall, but then the world has added millions more in the thirty years since I left the city. I thank Val Colon for arranging the event. Even token notices of the past give the Local meaning, although the present bears the responsibility for a successful organization and guarantees its future. Best wishes to all, with high hopes for a long life for Local 1930.

POLLY BOOKHOUT

After my retirement, the high point of each year was traveling abroad to faraway places. Now I find traveling on planes and keeping up with younger travelers difficult. Books must be my new travel experience.

This year, two books took me away, Richard Powers' *The Overstory* and David Reich's *Who We Are and How We Got Here*. *The Overstory* follows tree lovers, beginning with a Norwegian immigrant in Brooklyn who moves to Iowa. Several generations later, his descendant and others travel to the west coast to defend trees. A captivating and diverse cast of tree lovers, in addition to the Iowa native, is included. *Who We Are and How We Got Here* uses

new DNA research to tell how our species dispersed within Africa and migrated to all the continents. We meet ghost branches of the human tree. DNA shows how farmers replaced hunter-gatherers in Europe and how pastoralists spread the Indo-European languages east and west from central Asia.

While traveling on the subway, I am reading *The Library Book* by Susan Orlean, who is, of course, an enthusiastic library supporter.

EMILY COHEN

A few months ago, I had a mishap that led to a near-death experience. When descending the stairs in the senior center, I tripped and fell down the last four or five. I picked myself up and seemed to be fine except for scrapes on both my shins.

Three days later, my left leg began to swell and turn colors. The scrape had become an infected wound known as cellulitis.

It was at the hospital that I had my near-death experience. It had nothing to do with the leg injury. A big, dense meatball was the culprit that nearly caused my demise. It was part of the meatballs and spaghetti lunch served to the patients one day. I must have taken too big a bite and began choking. Soon I was gasping for air but could not catch my breath. Right away, hordes of hospital staff came to my rescue with the Heimlich maneuver, oxygen, etc. I was soon okay. As a nurse commented later, if a person is choking, there is no better place to get help than a hospital!

MARCIA LOYD

As I sit at my desk, my mind wanders the lonely road of my existence. In my life at this point, a week after Thanksgiving 2018, I feel satisfied and happy about a great deal.

My oldest grandson is about to graduate from John Jay School of Law and go off to law school. My youngest is working for a non-profit organization that helps students prepare for their GED.

My son made the Thanksgiving turkey. His wife made the greens, stuffing, mac'n' cheese, and candied yams.

I made my sweet potato pie. It was nice to have someone else do all the cooking for a change.

I no longer work at HRA/Reserve; it ended for me in June of this year. It was a joyful assignment that lasted eight years. After my years at NYPL and then HRA, I am done working. I just started *Becoming* by Michelle Obama; it is good.

I have endured my co-op's being renovated; it was painful, but at last it is over. I have lived in this complex for forty-three years and have wonderful memories. I did not go on any trips this year because, as a member of the board of directors, my overseeing things required constant supervising.

As we turn the corner to another year, I wish all a peaceful, loving year filled with warmth, caring, sensitivity, and prosperity.

MARCIA PURCELL

Health issues are a dominant fact of life in retirement. Several friends this past year have had serious issues and recovered, but this made us consider the passage of time, and we agreed that it was time for a "girls getaway." MUCH discussion resulted in a cruise to Cuba. Most interesting and a tad depressing. Havana is/could be so beautiful, and parts are a UNESCO World Heritage site--which comes with its own problems re restoration. It is a rum- and cigar-lover's paradise. Of course, the vintage cars are just amazing and create their own time warp, as does the Tropicana nightclub review (1939-2018). Las Vegas, eat your heart out! Any fan of Ernest Hemingway will love his house (Finca Vigia). In short, worth while and makes you appreciate the USA. Spending time with old and dear friends--priceless!

VICTORIA SCOTT

I am a member of AARP and go on one- to five-day bus trips every month. We flew to South Dakota in 2016 and had a nine-day Caribbean cruise last year. On August 5, I flew back to Scotland to visit family and friends; I stayed till the end of the month.

HARA SELTZER

I work occasionally giving tours at the Mount Vernon Hotel Museum on East 61 Street. This is a 1799 building that was a hotel from 1826 to 1833. People

went there to get out of the city and go to what was then the country. I also work two Sundays a month on information desks at the Museum of Modern Art. This is just like working for the library, without getting paid.

KARLAN SICK

Thanks to a generous grant from Agnes Gund's Art for Justice Fund, Literacy for Incarcerated Teens board members have been kept busy trying to locate New York juvenile detention sites so appropriate books can be supplied.

No single person has all of the contact information, so this has been a challenge. Ma'Lis Wendt is the treasurer for LIT and has a big job now that LIT has received the money. It is great to have concerned librarians, editors, and retired teachers on the board.

The grant came about because of past work on YALSA [Young Adult Library Services Association] award committees. I was on the committees which awarded Walter Dean Myers the Michael L. Printz award and the Margaret A. Edwards award, so I got to know him at ALA conferences. He came with me to detention centers in the Bronx and spoke with the teens there. Walter's son Christopher suggested LIT to the foundation, and we suddenly had money to spend. It's work, but it's fun, too. I am pleased that The New York Public Library supported participation in ALA. It has enriched my life and continues to do so.

ZAHAVA STESSEL

I participated last summer in an interesting program called "Witness Theatre." The idea was to tell the story of a life experience with a group of high school students acting it out.

As an Auschwitz survivor who had lost her parents, grandparents, and all their possessions, it was comforting to talk to young teenagers. They were at the age of my sister and me during the Holocaust in Hungary. The process and details of acting out our story brought me closer to the realization of how easily the seeds of hatred were planted and how the concept of the inhuman "other" was developed.

I recalled Marta, my childhood best friend. We supported each other, in school and afterwards, against the anti-Semitism around us. Hateful words were

followed by painful actions, and it didn't take long until we were on the train to Auschwitz.

Before leaving our town in Northeastern Hungary, my birthplace as well as that of my father and grandfather, all our jewelry was taken from us. I was there with Marta, holding our painful ears as earrings we had from childhood were forcibly pulled out and taken away.



Marta and her sister were in Bergen-Belsen, could even have been in the same barrack as Anne Frank. They also suffered from typhus. Marta died a day before liberation, her sister a day after.

When I see those bodies thrown in a mass grave in Bergen-Belsen, I see Marta's sad face and tearful eyes among them. My sincere prayer and deepest

fear is that her fate not be that of any other human being.

Zahava Szász Stessel is the author of *Wine and Thorns in Tokay Valley: Jewish life in Hungary: The history of Abaújszántó* and *Snow Flowers: Hungarian Jewish Women in an Airplane Factory*, Markkleeberg, Germany.

ARLINE WILSON

While I wasn't looking, while I was attending to all the distracting minutia of life, I recently looked up and found myself to be an octogenarian. Why the surprise? Certainly the mathematical progression from 79, a year ago, dictates that 80 would be next, but still I'm in shock. What is there about being 80? It's a lovely number: robust, round, nicely balanced, quite cheerful-looking while missing the hard edges many of the other numbers have. It's quite attractive if you step back and look at it objectively. How objective can I be about entering my eighth decade? The answer is, not very, not very at all. In my wildest imagination, I never saw myself as an 80-year-old. Yet when I look in the mirror, there I am, clearly an 80-year-old woman regarding herself very subjectively. I'll admit I'm wiser than I've ever been. Although my memory plays disappearing tricks on me, the wayward memories are always



retrieved. It would be so lovely to retrieve them when I need them, not hours later when they pop into my head unbidden.

Octogenarian, it sounds like a category on *Jeopardy* for twelve-letter words. As I stand here before the mirror ruminating about my new status, I realize that I have an odd reverence for my wrinkles. I've earned every single one of them. Euphoria, joy, tragedy, heartbreak—all the highs and lows of my life so far are etched there for all to see. I came by these etchings honestly. They belong to me, evidence of a life well-lived. When I witness the botoxed among us, stone faced, lips plumped up with alien substances, chasing the cult of youth, it makes me sad, sad and grateful that I never felt the need that drives them.

Although I own my etchings, not so for bodily dysfunction. How is it that a body that operated practically flawlessly for many years needs assistance performing acts previously taken for granted? How is it that my stride, once so swift and sure, has become so tentative and uncertain? And then there are the naps. Apparently they're not only for toddlers. Exhaustion sets in by evening if I don't carve out at least forty minutes for a nap each day! Nobody ever tells you this stuff! But no more of this. I fear that my ruminating is getting perilously close to whining, and I never could abide a whiner.

Somehow I know that my next birthday will be anticlimactic. 80 is a shock, 81 not so much.

JOE YRANSKI

I continue to program and introduce silent films around the country, my favorite appearance having been at the Paramount Theatre's 90th Anniversary celebration in Seattle, where I did a PowerPoint presentation with NYPL's vivacious and ever-busy Marilyn Iarusso sitting in the fifth row. I continue to work in film restoration at Warner Bros. and at The Library of Congress, where for a week I was part of a group that identified sixty-eight previously unknown films from various film archives around the world.

IN CASE OF A RETIREES DEATH

In the event of a retiree's death, it is important that the following be contacted by the next of kin.

NYPL Human Resources Service Center (212) 621-0500, prompt 4, for general NYPL questions.

DC37 (212) 815-1234, for union benefits information.

New York State Retirement System (866) 805-0990, toll-free, for pension questions and to inform NYSRS of the person's death date. A death certificate will be required as proof of death. Callers will need to listen to several prompts and choose the option that best suits their needs. The NYSERS website is: <http://www.osc.state.ny.us/retire/retirees/index.php>

The New York Public Library Retirees Association would also like to be contacted so that we may inform the deceased's former colleagues. This may be done by emailing or calling President Becky Koppelman at blekopp@gmail.com or 212-874-6199.

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