

# NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY RETIREES ASSOCIATION NEWSLETTER

Fall/Winter 2022/2023

Issue 49

## RETIREES REMEMBER



By Brigid Cahalan

I was working as a librarian at the Bloomingdale Library. As I had to make a booklist and had no desk of my own, I needed to find space in the public area that could accommodate me and several huge volumes of *Books in Print*. All the tables in the reference area were occupied, but I found one that had only a

teenage girl with her head down on the table, and an elderly man who strongly resembled Freud. What could go wrong?

As soon as I had my tomes surrounding me and my pen poised, the girl sat up and started staring at me. Unnerved, I asked if I could help her. She turned her head side to side and kept staring. After a minute, I asked if she needed anything; same response. Not being able to work with those eyes boring into me, I asked a third question, something like *are you okay?* It was the straw that broke the camel's back. She rose to her feet and got into position to karate chop and kick me simultaneously.

I leapt up and started running around the nearby atlas case, with the girl in hot pursuit. The librarian on the desk was John Whitt. Anyone who knew John knew that he was legally blind and could see things clearly only if they were very near. After what seemed like a long time, John spotted the blur by the atlas case, noticed me in the middle of it, and moved toward us. "What's going on?" he demanded, followed by "I don't care what's going on, you get out!" pointing the girl to the door. Her demeanor completely changed, and she did as she was told.

See page 3

Yep, just a typical day in the library.

More remembrances on page 3.

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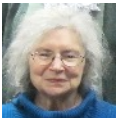
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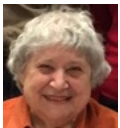
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## ASSOCIATION WEBSITE:

[www.nyplretirees.org](http://www.nyplretirees.org)

We are proud of our website, which is administered by Polly Bookhout. If you have not yet looked at it, why not take a look now?

Two of the most popular features you will find there are "People" and "Newsletters." When you select "People," you will see a list in alphabetical order by surname of all of the people who have been written about in our association's newsletters. Included are the issues and page numbers where they appear. By clicking on the link, you will be taken to that issue and can then go to the page on which to read about the person you have chosen.

The "Newsletters" feature brings you a list of past newsletters all the way back to issue #1, which was published in 1993, the year our association came into being. You can select any of these and will then be able to read the entire issue as it appeared.

## ASSOCIATION E-MAIL:

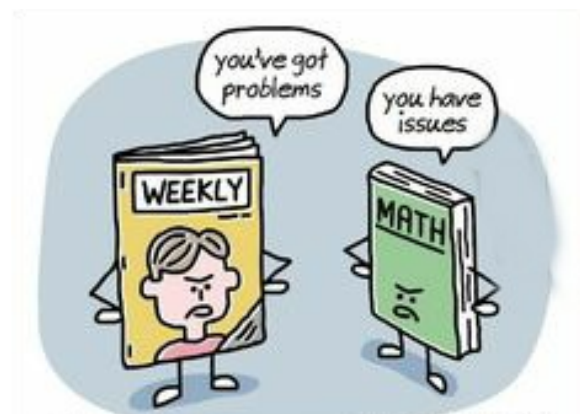
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## WELCOME NEW MEMBERS

Sorry to say, no new members.

## IN MEMORY OF

Happy to say, no deaths!



## **MORE RETIREE REMEMBRANCES**

### **NORMA HERZ**

Neighborhoods are different, each with its own character, and the Library, to its great credit, encouraged us to know and serve our people. Laurel Alexander, as Stapleton's branch librarian, reached out in many imaginative ways. One I particularly remember began when a little boy came home from his first day of school and said, "They say that I am Chinese. What is Chinese?" His words became a simple, beautiful invitation, the cover written in fine calligraphy by librarian Bill Lee, to a program in which several scholars from the Chinese-American Club spoke on aspects of Chinese culture. Around the walls of Stapleton's small auditorium were joyful, framed scissor cuttings from the collection of Peter Shek (who also taught "the young guys" martial arts). One instance of seeking to share the best.

May I add just one more vivid memory? It was the day that a very tall man in a wooly sailors cap appeared at our charging desk. Pete Seeger! (An item in the *New York Times* about the Stapleton community and the caring effort going into its renaissance, plus a letter describing some of this, written in the middle of the night to Pete by the children's librarian, likely had something to do with this happening.) A replica of a Hudson River sloop, like Pete's environmental boat, the *Clearwater*, was in the children's room glass case at the time. Pete walked to the children's biography section, pulled out a book about Sir Ernest Henry Shackleton, and proceeded to tell us the harrowing, amazing tale of Antarctic exploration in which a leader brought back every one of his men. Whew!

Whether in programs, exhibits, or book collections, we got up in the morning wanting to give our best. No wonder we loved the Library.

### **ROBERT SHEEHAN**

I came to NYPL on November 10, 1955, fresh from the arms of the 8th Infantry division, Fort Carson, Colorado. There I had bravely served my nation for two years by sitting behind a typewriter being a private secretary to a colonel and a major. I typed my tail off and never received a medal for bravery. I did, however, get to labor overtime in the vineyards of the army library for \$0.70 a day. Upon my discharge, I

ran straight to the arms of mother Library, who paid slightly better: \$4,000.00 per year. I found the Library in wondrous excitement. We were preparing to open Donnell!!!!!! The plans were ready, the staff enthralled, and the city entranced. The collection was pouring in. It seemed enormous, enormous. But when we hit our stride in three weeks and our circulation went to 3,000 per day, I learned the great NYPL fact: there are never enough books or librarians.

My very special day at Donnell was December 8, 1955. This was the day when I met Kay [Katherine] Lord O'Brien. She was to be my friend, supervisor, and sometimes royal pain in the neck for forty years. She was the unique example of the utterly devoted NYPL employee. Her world was limited to the library and the library and the library and only then to other things. She grew up on a farm in upstate New York. She planned to be a classics teacher, but she was waylaid by a serious illness that hospitalized her. She often joked that her illness left her short of 14 feet of intestines and holding a useless contract to teach Greek and Latin in a rich convent school in Wisconsin. Kay liked to say that she was an Episcopalian compromise between her Irish Catholic father's faith and her American mother's Methodism. She liked the classic languages, but, once—however by default—she had a taste of the creative supervision of librarianship, she never wanted to return to the academic world. She developed a passion for planning far into the library's future. We made a strange team for over forty years: she the planner, me the obedient executor. It worked, but it worked at times with great strains and seriously compromised aims. I, of course, was perfect in every way, and that helped.

I have always felt that Kay reached her pinnacle of professional achievement at Donnell rather than at Mid-Manhattan. She had the full opportunity at Donnell to develop her skills for group-work and programming. In Donnell she had the opportunity to develop her planning skills in a multiplicity of directions: group-work, materials collection, staff development. All of these things were grist for her planning mill, and she used them well. This was a remarkable woman.

But KO'B and, indeed, God Himself could not have handled the New York fiscal crisis that wrung us dry in the 1970's. Oh, we had the inner glory of visible success: our departments handled 6,000 patrons per day. But, with neither staff nor money, we were often so reduced to frustration and make-do solutions that KO'B wept bitter tears, and I used brilliant cuss words. Still and all, though, we did have that joy of visible success. "6,000 patrons per day" has a joyful ring to it. In whatever sphere KO'B now wanders, I can imagine her final fulfillment. It would be "7,000" patrons a day. She was remarkable indeed

I grew up in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, a region famous for its Presbyterian conservatism. We had fine libraries, God bless Carnegie, but little imagination or experimentalism. NYPL was the opposite. It seemed determined to fulfill just about every desire its patronage expressed for exotic group work. Cultural experimentation was definitely welcomed. Lectures, classes, discussion groups—all were available for free. And it must be said that under KO'B they were concentrated in the Donnell Library Center, with its 263 auditorium seats and eight conference rooms. My god—even free classes in Chinese. Can I reminisce about the night we offered a free program of Irish poetry read by Siobhan McKenna, the woman many people thought had the finest extant English diction? We offered 263 free auditorium seats—AND 800 people arrived to claim them. YEP, that was quite a night. A wondrous institution—NYPL!!!

Several years after my retirement, a staff member asked what my "most unpleasant" time in the library was. The question startled me. I never really thought of any of those thirty-four years as ever "unpleasant." But the longer I thought of it, the more I thought of the Vera<sup>1</sup> period as unpleasant, horrible, and dreadful. Vera was an organization devoted to assisting drug addicts and ex-convicts said to be seeking to start life anew. Our arrangement with them was based on mutual need. Due to the Fiscal Crisis of the 1970's, we needed staff if we wanted to stay open, and Vera had the staff, the money, the political backing. Those involved in this social experiment soon learned that this was a mess, and we were an unwillingly part of it. The workers Vera provided often were addicted to heroin and still actively using the shit; many were using methadone, and very many were involved in

various criminal activities of broad variety to finance their secret life. Many were cross-addicted to alcohol. In short order I became acquainted with violence, thievery, and insane behavior on the part of addicts, parolees, mentally ill whackos of all varieties.

We had endless problems with the Vera staff—mostly theft and personality things—which complicated many of my days. Here is an abbreviated list:

- My senior clerk was physically attacked by a Vera clerk who was long experienced in prison life.
- Death threats were delivered to me by telephone.
- Blank checks were stolen from my checkbook, which normally was kept locked in my locker.
- Money was stolen from my office.
- Fake checks were cashed in the cashier station on the lower floor (\$1500 in one week).
- Blank checks were used to get money from merchants.
- Calls were made to my apartment by crazies. The text of the call indicated the Vera source.
- Hundreds of blank library cards were stolen and then sold on the streets of Harlem.
- Drugs were used on library property.

It goes on and on. But these were only the minor problems...

In 1981, a jury convicted a clerk in the Materials Acquisitions Office of Mid-Manhattan and three others of gang-raping two fellow clerks whom they'd lured to their apartment with the promise of tickets to a rock concert—a classic "date rape."

## Footnotes

<sup>1</sup> Vera Institute of Justice is an independent, nonpartisan center for justice policy and practice. Its projects and reform initiatives, typically conducted in partnership with local, state, or national officials, are located across the United States and around the world. See [www.vera.org](http://www.vera.org)

## **HARA SELTZER**

One of the best things said to me, which I often re-quote, was from Miss Virginia Swift, who said "If you don't think you are going to like the answer, don't ask the question."

## **FRED MICHEL**

We had a program recommended by the Adult Services Office. It was for members of the military, both retired and active. The group read many different articles pertaining to war and peace times. We discussed them and the members' experiences after finishing their service. The program was well-attended, and most of the attendees returned for the four sessions. I found the program most enjoyable and enlightening, as did most of the group members.

## **LENORE COWAN**

I grew up in Arlington, Virginia, and my first library experience was when I entered the newly-built Thomas Jefferson Junior High in 1940. Arlington's elementary school had no libraries. There were a few donated books in each of my classrooms, which I devoured, but the real school library, which the school was so proud of having, was a first to me. The librarians offered chances to work in the library if you passed a simple Dewey Decimal test. I didn't pass, and the librarian told me I wasn't serious enough to be chosen.

At home, books were always of great importance to our family. I decided to arrange the bookshelves in my father's study with my rejected knowledge of the Dewey Decimal System. Since he was an economist in the Department of Agriculture, this didn't turn out to be as much fun as I expected. Most of the books were in the 300s, and I had been looking forward to the 700s and 800s.

When I married in 1949, my husband and I, both English majors and aspiring writers (never published) living in Manhattan, found NYPL played a big part in our lives—we used both the main reading room at 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue and several branch libraries.

In 1972, we began living on our sailboat at the World's Fair Marina in Flushing, Queens, and, when

we retired in 1983, we sailed down to Florida. Eventually, we became landlubbers again and built a house on the St. John's River. When my husband died in 2005, I began to think of a retirement apartment in the Daytona Beach area, and, in November 2006, I moved into the independent living apartments [of the] Riviera Senior Living Retirement Community.

I became a clerk at the Jackson Square Branch of NYPL on January 3, 1956. In late 1957, Miss [Ruth] Shinnamon, the branch librarian, suggested that I apply for one of four senior clerk positions currently being advertised. Jackson Square did not have a senior clerk, so I would be moving to a larger branch if I were accepted.

Three of the four were already filled when I applied, and the only one left was the circulation senior clerk in the Picture Collection. I had no idea what the Picture Collection was when I went to my appointment with the curator, Romana Javitz,<sup>1</sup> [in] Room 73 on the ground floor of the Fifth Avenue building. Room 73 turned out to be a very large room filled with grey bins full of grey folders, which contained the one-and-a-half million pictures making up the Picture Collection.

Miss Javitz had her office in an enclosed space under one of the ground-floor windows. I can't remember our conversation at this momentous meeting, though I somehow knew it was going well. Miss Javitz then told me that I had the job. And she asked me to go out to the public phone booths in the corridor by the elevators and call my husband about it, see if he agreed that I should take it. To this day I can't imagine why she asked me to do this. But I did as she said, went out and called my husband, though not to ask him if I should take the job, simply to say I was glad I'd be working there.

The date on my PCN I've saved is January 1, 1958. My first day began in Room 72, a big room across the corridor from Room 73. Immediately, I began to learn in what way the Picture Collection differed from branch libraries. Half of Room 72 had six desks with busy people working at unknown things. The other half of the room was basic picture work where every new staff member from page to senior librarian started the same way. Taught by a librarian or an experienced clerk, we sat at a long table, and from the shelves along the wall, we took a tray of pictures to "sort." "Sorting" was by means of a large unique fil-

ing device that put the pictures of a single tray into alphabetical order. I loved the work from that first day.

A love of books and reading was the reason I had applied for employment at NYPL, but since I was a very visual person, I had created a kind of “picture collection” of my own over many years. Now here I had fallen into something like heaven. Enormous numbers of pictures were taken out each day, and enormous numbers of pictures were returned each day. Every individual picture had a subject (A to Z covering the entire universe) printed by hand in pencil at the bottom left of the picture. In the center above was a number or a series of letters which told from what source the picture was cut.

This subject-assigning and “source” business meant nothing to me that first day, but cataloging became the favorite of my M.S. [Master of Library Service] classes at Columbia, so there was another bit of heaven awaiting me. For now, just to see the pictures and carefully note the subject headings assigned to each was enough.

As the circulation senior clerk, I was in charge of three desks located in the hallway outside Room 73. Charging pictures out and putting them into an outsize grey envelope was the first desk. Accepting returned envelopes and placing the pictures in trays was the third desk. The middle desk was for signing up new borrowers. Seeing that the three desks ran smoothly and solving the problems that arose was my job.

Anyone could borrow pictures, just as anyone could borrow books. In 1923, NYPL had created a collection of circulating pictures in the Fifth Avenue building in order to serve the large number of artists, illustrators, and designers who worked in New York City. This originally small collection had grown to be the intricately-cataloged<sup>2</sup> million-and-a-half picture collection I began in. Working with the circulation aspect of it, I became very familiar with a specialized public of individuals and business organizations that were finding the Picture Collection very necessary to their working life.

Once I became involved with circulation, the “sorting” taught the first few days disappeared from my schedule. However, all pages, clerks, and librarians shared the chore of filing returned and alphabetized pictures into the grey folders in the grey bins of Room

73. Four senior librarians joined Miss Leak, the assistant branch librarian, and Miss Javitz in being exempt from filing. From my view in the early days, it looked as if they had arcane duties involving pictures and subject matters I knew nothing about. But I learned that even beginning librarians were taught how to cut up books and periodicals and to assign headings to pictures. Inevitably, I wanted to enter this world myself. In 1959, I enrolled at Columbia [University] for a master’s degree in library science.

In July 1968, I became curator of the Picture Collection when Miss Javitz retired. In the years since I [had] started, I had spent time in all three of the senior clerk positions and in all necessary librarian positions, including being the assistant branch librarian. At some point in my years of increasing responsibility, Miss [Casindania P.] Eaton felt that she must warn me that if I persisted in wanting to stay only in [the] Picture Collection, I could never rise any higher than principal librarian (which was the curator position), but if I diversified into other branch positions, I had a chance to reach higher.

From the first, I felt that working in the Picture Collection was what I wanted to do with my working life in NYPL. Now that I was curator, I wanted to continue making this branch library develop in ways to provide ever better service to the public.

My ten-and-a-half years under Romana Javitz remain a treasured memory. She was unique. She was certainly noted for being as individualistic as possible, but she was, foremost, a brilliant innovator in her field, who had poured all her intelligence and her will into the NYPL Picture Collection for forty-four years, and I was lucky enough to have a decade of those years under her tutelage.

In the fifteen years I was curator, one of the most demanding jobs I had was the move from Room 73 to the third floor of Mid-Manhattan.<sup>3</sup> A whole new system for the public’s access to the files had to be created. Gone were the grey bins and grey folders, replaced by a more modern look better suited to our new quarters. The basic processes of cutting up books and periodicals, mounting the pictures, assigning subjects, cataloging sources, did remain the same. But our surroundings were all so new, so fresh. Therefore, it seemed strange to me to read in a clipping from *The New York Times*, which a friend sent to me, that President [Anthony W.] Marx, in his

response to Michael Kimmelman's article, says that Mid-Manhattan is "degraded."

Truly, tempus fugit.

### Footnotes

<sup>1</sup> Romana Javitz (1903-1980) was appointed head of NYPL's Picture Collection in 1929 after the retirement of Ellen Perkins. Her innovation and leadership established the Picture Collection as an active element in the artistic life and record of the United States. See [www.nypl.org/locations/tid/45/node/62019](http://www.nypl.org/locations/tid/45/node/62019) for a history of the Picture Collection and Javitz's role, including a description of the system of subject access to images.

<sup>2</sup> The unique, highly specialized cataloging system developed by the Picture Collection recognizes the use of images for their information content as well as visual illustrations.

<sup>3</sup> The Mid-Manhattan renovation of 1980-81(?) created a street-level presence on Fifth Avenue and opened the first, second and third floors to public service. The Picture Collection, previously housed in Rooms 72 and 73 of the Central Building (now the Stephen A. Schwarzman Building), and the Art Collection, formerly housed at the Donnell Library, both relocated to Mid-Manhattan's third floor.

### **JEAN PINCKNEY**

My experiences at NYPL were very interesting and varied. Being a certified teacher from Guyana, South America, I was always looking for a job that was related to teaching and found one in librarianship. I came to NYPL with little knowledge of regular office work and was employed as a secretary to the Head of Collection Development, Juanita S. Doares. JSD, as we called her, was a strict supervisor but kind in her own way. I learned a lot from her about the workings of the library, and, when she retired, I became the Administrative Associate to the Director for Technical Services (or Preparation Services as it was then called), Michael Breuer. I decided to take JSD's advice and enter library school at Queens College. I soon found this was what I wanted to do, be a librarian.

After graduation, I became a trainee librarian and cataloger under Chief of Cataloging, Karen Hsu. Here I was able to put my language skills in Latin, French, and German into practice. I ended up cataloging

books and non-book materials such as CDs and DVDs. As luck would have it, I applied for and secured a job in the new Science Industry and Business Library on Madison Avenue. Here was an opportunity for me to advance and to be exposed to other library skills, such as reference, circulation, teaching classes in computer literacy, patents and trademarks, working in the computer lab, and to impart my knowledge of science to visiting high school students in the form of databases. I advanced from an LII to an LIII, supervising thirteen-and-a-half technical staff members under the Head of Technical Services, Virginia Taffurelli.

Unfortunately, my career at NYPL came to a close when one day some robbers accosted my retired husband in our apartment in Brooklyn. This made him want to return to his place of birth, South Carolina, where he had already acquired a home for us and was waiting patiently for me to retire. Well, as the song says, "You can't keep a good man down," so when I moved there, I immediately started working as a part-time librarian at Trident Technical College and worked for six years before fully retiring. I am now retired and taking care of my sick husband between periods of teaching Sunday school and computer classes and doing missionary work for my church. I feel truly blessed and enjoy giving back to those less fortunate.

### **PHYLLIS CURRENT**

I am Phyllis Current, and I built the first circulating record library at St. George Regional Library on Staten Island, starting in 1952.

Our specialty was one-to-one service. Here is something about our borrowers. Some of our teenagers became conductors and composers, and some parents didn't like the classical music they brought home.

One of the highlights of my life was the discussion group of borrowers called "Music, History, and Ideas," which used records and books. The discussion went on for five years, through the historical periods. All adult librarians took the Great Books Foundation leadership training using the Socratic Method.

My husband used the collection, and he was the most sensitive person to music I've ever known, and he had no music education.

A colleague, a children's librarian, used this collection to develop her opera interest. And to this day, her retirement life is her subscription to the Metropolitan Opera. We had multiple copies of all the operas each season, enough for all. Of course, this was Staten Island, not plausible in the other Boroughs. In one of the blackouts, we had light, and Manhattan borrowers got caught in the Manhattan subways with our records.

In the beginning, I did cataloging. I ordered the Donnell collection from mine, and then it proceeded like that with the Fordham collection, and then from there came the Lincoln Center collection. From then on, the three librarians and the cataloger met monthly for record selection, but we each did our own ordering, and orders were placed collectively. We developed our own excellent classification for the records.

### **RICHARD JACKSON**

As an undergraduate student in the 1950s, I worked part-time in the various departments of the main library on the campus of Tulane University—from the browsing room to the order department. As a graduate student in musicology, I worked in a small library of the music department. After I had worked there for a year, the elderly music librarian said she had wanted to retire for some time, and now that I knew the routines so well, she felt secure in doing so. So, unprepared with technical training of any kind, I found myself the music librarian—ordering, cataloging recordings, supervising a very small staff, and generally operating the place on a daily basis. (There was an occasional time-out, of course, when I attended classes of my own.)

In the summer of 1958, I happened to be in New York walking on Amsterdam Avenue at West 66<sup>th</sup> Street and saw the enormous excavation for the future New York Public Library at Lincoln Center. I certainly didn't imagine I would be working in that spot in seven years.

At Tulane, my professor, Gilbert Chase, the author and respected historian of American music, recommended me to be head of the American music collection in the Music Division (Reference) of The

New York Public Library upon my graduation. I did not get the job but moved to New York anyway, working in the Library of New School for Social Research for almost three years.

Recovering from an appendectomy in the summer of 1965, I received a call from Phillip L. Miller, Chief of the NYPL Music Division: was I still interested in the American-music job at NYPL, he asked. I was. I went to work there in the early fall at Lincoln Center, the library not yet open to the public; that would happen a little later. After Mr. Miller (whose wife Catherine was head librarian at NYPL's music lending library on 58<sup>th</sup> Street), I worked under two other chiefs of the division during my twenty-five years there: the dedicated Frank C. Campbell (Mr. Miller's former first assistant) and the expert Jean Bowen, Frank's former first assistant.

While I set about trying to convince everyone I wasn't a total fraud, I found out that in addition to supervising the American-music holdings, I would, on a daily basis, do what the five or six other music reference librarians, including the chief and first assistant, did: draft reference letters, sit in turn at the three public reference desks, and assist readers in other ways. One of the public reference desks was a telephone-answering service, which was the liveliest and most demanding of the music reference services there.

I soon learned that a major bloc of users of the division were students from the many colleges and music conservatories in the New York area. The libraries of those institutions were able to tailor their budgets accordingly.

During my early years at NYPL, I was able to get a master of library science degree by attending classes at night for three years at Pratt Institute in Brooklyn. Throughout my tenure, I was frequently involved in exhibitions either as curator or assistant. The exhibitions were mounted in the division's own large walk-in wall unit or in the building's two major display areas: the Vincent Astor Gallery or the Amsterdam Gallery. Certainly, two of the most memorable exhibitions we presented were the striking and hilarious one devoted to mechanical music-making machines (from a strange antique, but working, coin-operated violin-piano apparatus called a Violano Virtuoso to a colorful modern juke box) and [the one] devoted to the contemporary American composer Elliott Carter, for which the library published an elegant sixty-four-page catalog.

The personal highlights of my NYPL years, however, were the six music collections I published based on the Library's magnificent holdings. Perhaps most significant of these were *Democratic Souvenirs: An Anthology of 19<sup>th</sup> Century American Music*, for which Jean and I spoke on radio station WQXR to promote, and the three collections of various types of music by the nineteenth-century composed Louis Moreau Gottschalk. One of them, *The Little Book of Louis Moreau Gottschalk*, [was] based on six unpublished handwritten piano manuscripts in the Music Division. The New York Public Library was the publisher or co-publisher of three of the collections.

Among our readers was the inevitable "character" who became a regular in our reading room. For some obscure reason, he copied standard orchestra scores in our collection on huge sheets in a large hand. This went on for years. After he had a heart attack in the reading room and died shortly after in a nearby hospital, we learned he had willed his big, pointless handwritten scores to the Library. Some of us could forgive that more easily, however, than his stuffy reaction when the pages one day slyly placed a party hat on Beethoven's great sculpted head on the composer's birthday. That monumental marble head of Beethoven glowered over the reading room from its shoulder-high pedestal for my entire time in the Music Division.

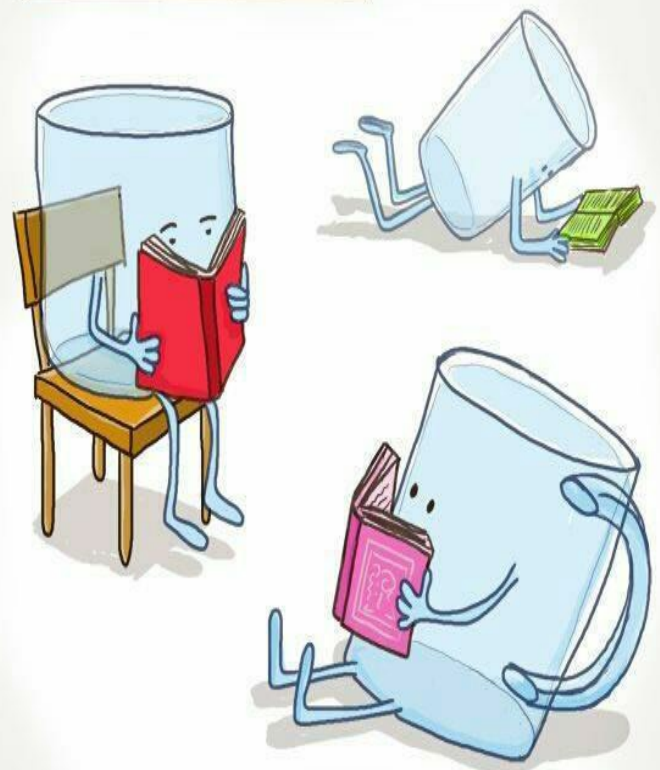
After I retired from the Library in 1990, I volunteered and worked part-time there for four years. A call from Juanita Doares in 1994<sup>1</sup> invited me to an organizational meeting of NYPL retirees to be held at the apartment of Betty Gubert. As I remember, the meeting was a rather small one and did not last long, but the New York Public Library Retirees Association was named and officers elected. Juanita was elected the first president. I have remained a member of the organization since that first meeting.

Soon after the meeting, I returned to my hometown of New Orleans in December 1994. The day of the reference librarian seems to be fading. It is being replaced by a computer. However this development is assessed, there can be absolutely no question that my career as a reference librarian at NYPL was super: I was asked to help people while working with material I loved, in one of the world's great music collections, and people unknowingly helped me greatly.

### Footnotes

<sup>1</sup>This may have been 1993.

## READING GLASSES



## 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 Death Benefit Unit  
(212) 815-1373 or (212) 815-1374

New York State and Local Retirement System (866) 805-0990, toll-free, for pension questions and to inform NYSLRS 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 NYSLRS website is:  
<http://www.osc.state.ny.us/retire/retirees/index.php>

## **TEEN WITH A DREAM: THE RIVERDALE BRANCH**

### ***"DEAR LITTLE OLD LIBRARY"***

By Pat Pardo



The Dodge children: Grace Dodge at left.

During 1872, most privileged sixteen-year-old girls dreamt of a debutante ball, college, and a long European trip. Not Grace H. Dodge! She dreamt of providing people with a library of books. With the help of her first patron, the William E. Dodge family's gardener John Beatty, a one-shelf library was established in the estate's greenhouse. Mr. Beatty was so enthused that he went around to the many estates in the Riverdale area and invited all their staff members to borrow books.

The greenhouse library hours were planned with the workers in mind. Patrons utilized the collection and reading area on evenings and Sundays. Soon, one shelf of books turned into quite a few. By October 23, 1883, Grace had announced that the Riverdale Library Association was to be formed and a library building

would be built "to furnish a circulating library, Reading Room, and other means of entertainment and the improvement of the neighborhood." At this first meeting, to encourage her in this project, were the new Riverdale Library Association members, who included Mr. and Mrs. Percy R. Payne, who supplied building construction funds; financier Samuel D. Babcock, who funded all things that pertained to the plot and landscaping; and publisher William H. Appleton, host of this meeting. Mr. Appleton said that he would secure interest in the project from his clients, Charles Darwin, Lewis Carroll, Sir Arthur C. Doyle, and John Stuart Mill, to name a few. The cupola-roofed library was built at the corner of West 253<sup>rd</sup> Street and Mosholu Avenue.

The "Dear Little Old Library," as the Riverdale Library Association members referred to it, eventually outgrew the relatively new building. In 1911, a larger building on Riverdale Avenue was acquired. This building, called "Jumbo," was actually "an orderly saloon" that became the Dear Old Little Library's annex for club meetings, social services, and most of the larger events. For a small charge of ten cents, patrons of all ages could participate in a myriad of activities, such as stereopticon and minstrel shows, plays, lectures, classes, festive galas, and welfare relief services. The Riverdale Health League also provided preventive medical assistance at Jumbo.

It was decided in 1921 to merge the library with the Jumbo building's activities and form the Riverdale Neighborhood Association. The Dear Little Old Library building stayed open until 1935 when it was demolished for the Henry Hudson Parkway. The Library's contents and staff then moved to a vacant store at 5652 Mosholu Avenue.

In 1937, the present day building of the Riverdale Neighborhood House was built and opened at 5621 Mosholu Avenue behind PS 81, which fronts Riverdale Avenue. The Library was welcomed into the building and gifted with more room than the store's interior had provided.

The library was administered by its own staff until July 1, 1954, when it was incorporated into New York Public Library's branch system. The Library's door key was presented to John Mackenzie Cory, then Chief of the Circulation Department (renamed Branch Libraries in 1966). The Riverdale, short for the

Riverdale Library Association, was officially renamed the Riverdale Branch of New York Public Library. For the fourth time, the Library became too small to accommodate the many patrons from the surrounding areas of Spuyten Duyvil, Upper Kingsbridge, and lower Yonkers, as well as Riverdale, along with several hundred students and teachers from PS 81. Additionally, a large stream of residents continually visited from the many units of the Netherland Gardens Cooperative located across Riverdale Avenue.

Once again, the Dodge family stepped forward. This time, in 1961, the Cleveland H. Dodge Foundation purchased the land across Mosholu Avenue from the Riverdale Neighborhood House. New York Public Library did not have enough capital budget to build the new branch, so a leaseback agreement was drawn up between New York Public Library and Riverdale Neighborhood House whereby NYPL would pay a monthly rent to Riverdale Neighborhood House until the twenty-year mortgage was paid in full. At that time, The New York Public Library would obtain ownership of the building. The cost of the branch was about one-third of a million dollars. A ground-breaking ceremony took place on June 19, 1964. According to The New York Public Library's Manuscript and Archives Division, the official dedication of the new branch took place on October 26, 1965. The Riverdale Branch's homepage on NYPL's website states that the present branch opened in 1967.

The Riverdale Branch was designed by architect, Robert L. Bien. The exterior and interior resemble a church with a high vaulted ceiling. It is one of the few branches with a gated, fenced, and landscaped front yard. The branch is also home to the two other New York Public Library lion mascots, River and Dale. Riverdale Branch is located at the intersection of 5540 Mosholu Avenue and West 256<sup>th</sup> Street.

The Dodge family's literary interest also established the first, second, and third Kingsbridge Branch locations beginning in June 1894 as the Kingsbridge Free Library, founded and financed by Grace's younger brother, Charles H. Dodge



Adult area of Riverdale Branch

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**JACKSON SQUARE LIBRARY**  
**ONCE AN 1880s PUBLIC LIBRARY, NOW A**  
**PRIVATE HOME IN THE WEST VILLAGE**

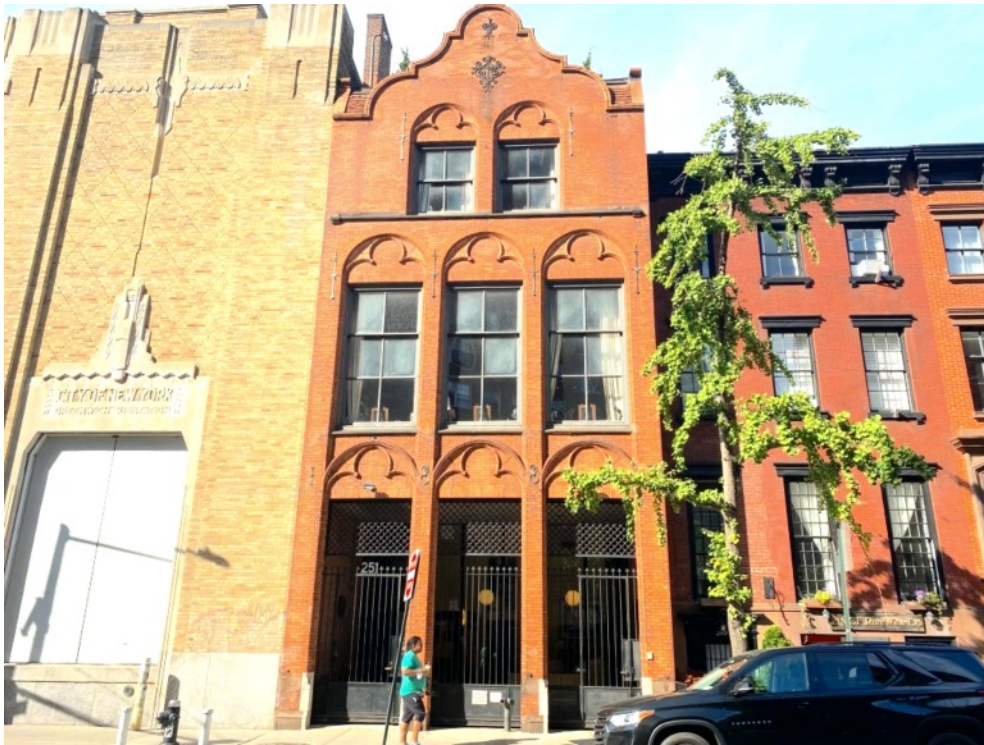
From: [ephemeralnewyork.wordpress.com](http://ephemeralnewyork.wordpress.com)

Thank you Pat Pardo

of literature, but bring it home and share it with their families,” states Village Preservation. The original library room, founded by the Grace Church group, held just 500 books and was open only two hours a week. But according to Village Preservation, “the free public reading room was so popular there were often lines around the block.”

This is where a member of the Vanderbilt family comes in. George Washington Vanderbilt II, a grandson of Commodore Vanderbilt and brother of the socially prominent W.K. Vanderbilt and Cornelius Vanderbilt II, decided to continue his family’s tradition of philanthropy by building and stocking a free circulating library for the people of New York City

“The youngest of eight children, [George Vanderbilt] was a quiet person with a



When you pass the three-story red-brick beauty at 251 West 13th Street—with its elegant arched windows and Dutch-style gabled roofline—you just know it was built for something special.

That special purpose was a noble one in Gilded Age New York. The building, near Eighth Avenue and at the end of Greenwich Avenue, served as a free public library—one of the city’s first.

The story of what became known as the Jackson Square Library began in 1879, when a teacher and other women affiliated with Grace Church formed the New York Free Circulating Library.

New York City was already home to many fine research libraries, such as the Astor Library (now the Public Theater) on Lafayette Place. But in 1879, these libraries were largely private and didn’t lend books.

“The New York Free Circulating Library was established to serve every New Yorker, especially the poor, and to allow them to not only read a wide range



The Library in an Undated Photo



Another Undated Photo. Note the remodeling of the neighboring house's front door.

strong interest in culture and the life of the mind, who had created and catalogued his own collection of books beginning at age 12," states Village Preservation. "The growing desire for a free circulating library in New York was just the sort of worthy project that captured the bibliophile's imagination."

Vanderbilt tapped architect Richard Morris Hunt (who also designed Vanderbilt's breathtaking North Carolina estate, Biltmore) for the task. In 1888, the Jackson Square Library, with more than 6,000 books, opened to readers.

"The walls of the library on the ground floor are tinted a robin's egg blue, while the book shelves and other woodwork are of walnut, which sets off the bright bindings of the books," wrote *The New York Times* in a preview of the library's interior. A second-floor reading room was described as "light and airy." To become a member of the library, applicants had to be at least "twelve years of age and able to give proper reference."

After The New York Public Library system formed in 1895, the Jackson Square Library operated as an NYPL branch. By the early 1960s, the library was "decommissioned," per Village Preservation. In the early 1970s, the Jefferson Market Library on Sixth Avenue and 10th Street took over as the NYPL branch for Greenwich Village.



The Adult Reading Room in the 1930s

It's hard to fathom, but after it closed, the Jackson Square Library was headed for the wrecking ball. In 1967, painter, sculptor, and performance artist Robert Delford Brown acquired it for \$125,000, according to a *New York Times* story in 2000. That saved the former library, which had hosted notable patrons like James Baldwin, Gregory Corso, and W.H. Auden, among others.

Brown gave the building a "radical renovation," according to the *Times*, and the results weren't necessarily successful. The former library was purchased in the 1990s by TV writer and producer Tom Fontana. Intending to use it as a

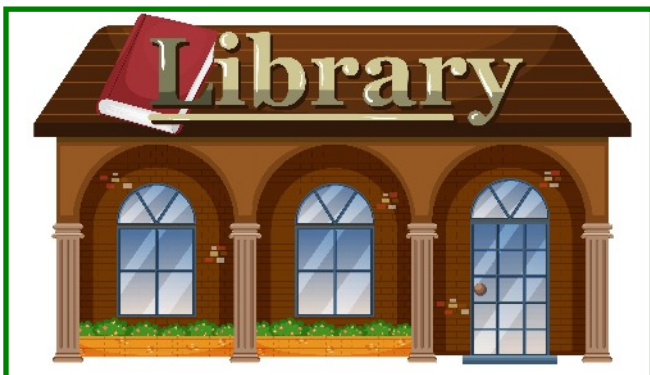
residence and work space, Fontana brought 251 West 13th Street back to its Gilded Age grandeur, at least

on the exterior—making it a delightful sight for passersby.

[Second, third and fourth photos: NYPL; fifth photo: Wikipedia, by John Singer Sargent]



George Washington  
Vanderbilt II by John Singer  
Sargent (with book in hand)



## JOHN CARRADINE: HE WORKED AT NYPL

By Pat Pardo



Putting the finishing touches to a bust  
of his five year old son, Bruce, in 1938

Among the many roles John Carradine played during his lifetime are sculptor, portrait artist, actor, and NYPL library staff member. According to his son, David, Mr. Carradine had been a staff member of the Film Collection and would often talk about his experiences. For aspiring storytellers and actors, Mr. Carradine recommended doing what he did as a youngster at school—committing entire passages from prayer books to memory. As a sculptor, he was the assistant to Daniel Chester French, the creator of the Abraham Lincoln statue in the Lincoln Memorial in Washington, D.C. and *The Minute Man* in Concord, Massachusetts.

Mr. Carradine is one of three NYPL members who have a star on the Hollywood Walk of Fame. Books about him and many of his films can be found in our NYPL collections. Theatrical photos and scripts are also included in the NYPL's Manuscript and Archives Division.

## RETIREE NEWS

### DAVID BEASLEY

In response to the request for personal news, I would like to note several publications that some may be interested in. Covid kept me isolated, thus giving me an incentive. There are articles on Major John Richardson in *Ontario History*, Autumn 2021 (“The Search for Major John Richardson’s Unknown Writings”); Frederick Grove in *Prairie History*, Winter 2021 (“Frederick Grove: Prairie Novelist (1879-1948)”); Wyndham Lewis in *The Montreal Review*, September 2021 (“Wyndham Lewis—the Intellectual as Artist”); Herman Whitaker in *The Montreal Review*, September 2021 (“Herman James Whitaker: Storyteller of North and South”); and Norman Newton in *The Montreal Review*, November/December 2022 (“Norman Newton: Polymath, Poet, and Dramatizer of Myth”).

The *Montreal Review* is online, and I like it because its articles are free to read. This link (<https://themontrealreview.com/fiction-and-poetry.php>) goes to the issue that has both the Lewis and Whitaker articles in it; this one (<https://www.themontrealreview.com/Articles/Norman-Newton-Polymath-Poet-and-Dramatizer-Of-Myth.php>) to the Newton article. The other two are available only in paper for the time being.

I think I previously mentioned that the NYPL Research Libraries helped with the Richardson article by finding and sending me a notice from the *Morning Star*, a New York newspaper from 1851. I thank Jackie Gold for directing me to the right place to ask. I am now reading for an article on Malcolm Lowry—very extensive and complicated.

### EMILY COHEN

I recently underwent focused ultrasound treatment to alleviate the tremor in my right hand. This disability had made it difficult for me to eat. I had to drink soup with a straw because it wouldn’t stay in the spoon. I spilled food on myself and on the floor. My handwriting was wavy and sometimes unintelligible even to myself. Even voting was affected because I could not fill in the little circles to mark the ballot. In order to perform the procedure, the doctor had to shave my head and I am now totally bald! It was worth it as my tremor is now gone!

### JULIE CUMMINS

From *The Daily Messenger*

#### NEWS ROUNDUP

## Local author a named character in famed writer’s latest

CANANDAIGUA — Author Julie Cummins of Canandaigua has written books about people, both real and historic.



A character in writer David Baldacci’s latest book, “Long Shadows,” is named for local author Julie Cummins of Canandaigua.

PHOTO PROVIDED

Now the page is turned on her. Julie won the top bid at a silent auction to benefit MS research as a named character in David Baldacci’s newest thriller, “Long Shadows.” She said she was thrilled with the news she had won.

Cummins will be the character “Judge Julia” and have a secure place in literary history in the New York Times bestselling author’s latest thriller. Baldacci has published 40 novels; all have been national and international bestsellers, and several have

been adapted for film and television.

Cummins has received an advance copy of Baldacci’s book, signed to her.

### JANE KUNTSLER

The Jane Kunstler Collection

A few weeks ago, my niece called to tell me she had Googled my name and discovered that there is a Jane Kunstler Collection in the Leonard H. Axe Library at Pittsburg State University in Kansas. I had had no idea that it existed, but I did know how it had come about. In 2016, when I was moving to a much larger apartment from the small overstuffed brownstone apartment I had lived in since 1973, I knew I had to weed my collection.

Let me go back a bit in history. I've been interested in politics from a very early age. The first presidential election I followed was the Eisenhower-Stevenson battle in 1952. Needless to say, Stevenson was my choice even though at the age of eight I thought "I like Ike" was a pretty catchy slogan. By 1960, I was firmly in JFK's camp. At the last rally before the election, at the Teaneck Armory in New Jersey, I was a "Kennedy Girl," one of perhaps two dozen high school girls chosen by the Bergen County Democratic Club to act as cheerleaders.

After that, being both a packrat and a librarian, I collected everything I could on the Kennedys. I had *Look* and *Life* magazine issues, newspaper articles,



books, recordings—anything I could get my hands on. I had the November 23, 1963, copy of *The New York Times*. It had all moved with me back to New York from New Jersey, but I decided that I couldn't take it all on another move, so I asked on Facebook if anyone wanted it. And lo and behold, a friend of mine who's a professor and systems person at Pittsburg State University said that her library would love to have the material. So I packed up the newspapers and magazines and sent them to her. I received a very nice letter of thanks from the University. And that, I thought, was the end of it—until, that is, I got that phone call from my niece. Who knew!

Here is the link to the collection:

<https://digitalcommons.pittstate.edu/fa/231/>

## **ANTHONY T. TRONCALE**

My book, *Words on Pictures: Romana Javitz and the New York Public Library's Picture Collection* won an honorable mention in the Photography Network's annual book prize competition. It was announced at the PN annual convention in Washington, D.C., October 13-15.

## **MA' LIS WENDT**

Karlan Sick and I are board members of Literacy for Incarcerated Teens (LIT), a small non-profit that provides support and programs to juvenile detention centers in New York City and State. I am the Treasurer of LIT and recently had an unexpected phone call from Bookworm Box, a charity subscription service and bookstore founded by bestselling author, Colleen Hoover. Their subscription service provides readers with the opportunity to receive signed novels in the mail each month from authors from all over the world. All profits from the subscription service are donated to various charities. My phone call was to say that LIT had been chosen as their latest charity, and we received a \$30,000 check from them. Since our budget is usually under \$50,000, this contribution has provided us with an opportunity to send many more books to our detention center sites.

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