

NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY RETIREES ASSOCIATION NEWSLETTER

Fall Winter 2023

Issue 51

BECKY KOPPELMAN, "STEEPED IN TRADITION"



Story on Page 3

Becky Koppelman served as the second president of the NYPL Retirees Association from 2004 to 2021, following founding President Juanita Doares. In 2022, Becky and her husband George moved to Savannah, Georgia, to be closer to their son Sam. In 2014, Becky was interviewed by Mary K. Conwell for the Retirees Association Oral History Project. The following are edited excerpts from that interview. [Story on page 3]

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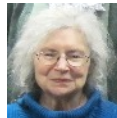
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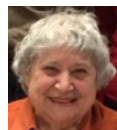
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OUR FACEBOOK PAGE

The Association has a Facebook page that Alan Pally administers. Facebook members should search the Association's name to view and like the page, which consists mainly of photos submitted by retirees, and, sadly of obituaries. Members are encouraged to submit photos to alanpally@gmail.com. Photos should depict your work at NYPL or at NYPL or Retiree Association events.

NYPL Retirees Association's Facebook page can be reached here:
facebook.com/search/top?q=nypl%20retirees

The NYPL Retirees website can be reached at www.nyplretirees.org

ASSOCIATION E-MAIL:

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WELCOME NEW MEMBERS

Angela Lindo

Eleanor Yadin

IN MEMORY OF

Lenore Cowen

Dorothy Ann Henderson

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BECKY KOPPELMAN, "STEEPED IN TRADITION"

Becky was born in 1939 in Coffeyville, Kansas, a small town of around 18,000 people right on the Santa Fe Railroad line near the Oklahoma border. Becky recalled, "When I was small, there was a nice Carnegie library. It seemed like every time I went to the library, the children's librarian was playing a recording [for] story hour. I believe it was Eva Le Gallienne telling one of her traditional tales, and it was the same story played every time I went to the library!" Becky, of course, went on to become an accomplished storyteller in her own right.

Although she was shy, Becky loved acting and was in plays in high school and later in college. At Pittsburg State Teachers College in Pittsburg, Kansas, she joined a theater group led by an English professor who had done some acting. "He had such a good group of us; there were people from the whole area who went to school there. And he thought we were so good he decided to start a summer stock. So, not only were we there during the winter, we stayed for summer school—but primarily to do plays. I ended up with an English major and a theater degree. The teacher started a musical summer theater because we'd all stand around and sing whatever the songs were from the popular musicals at that time." Becky swears she got a role in *Oklahoma* because she was one of the few who wasn't afraid to sing out.

"We had a guest director—an actor here in New York—who was affiliated with the summer stock Hyde Park Playhouse in Hyde Park, New York, where the Roosevelts lived. In fact, Eleanor Roosevelt was still alive at the time. The director and I even 'starred in' *Sunrise at Campobello*; I played Eleanor and he played FDR. He looked a little like FDR, and, with my jowls padded a little, I looked like Eleanor. It was very exciting! I was briefly in one musical—I think it was *Bye, Bye Birdie*—and I was just in the chorus. They didn't like to use the apprentices because if they used you too much, they had to put you in Actors Equity, and they didn't want to have to pay you. But it was a pretty wonderful experience. When I think back to it now, I think, how did I do that? But I knew I

wanted to come to New York City and be an actress, and my parents agreed, so that's how I got here."

It was the end of September 1962 when Becky came New York City; she was twenty-three years old. She stayed with a friend until she was finally able to get her own apartment. "I took some acting classes, but I really was not quite prepared for acting in New York City. I didn't feel as comfortable as I had at summer stock in Pittsburg, Kansas. So, I thought, 'well, I'll just get a job.' While I was in Pittsburg, there was a grade school and a high school right within the college for people who were getting their education degrees, and I worked in the high school library there. The two librarians were very lovely; they sort of took me under their wings, and I really enjoyed it. So when I was on a walk and saw New York Public Library I went in. I don't remember a lot about it, but Miss Ruppertsberg was there. I had to take the IQ test, and Miss Ruppertsberg's one remark was, 'Miss Eakins, your math skills are sadly very poor.' And I thought to myself, 'Yes, I know that, but I hope I don't have to use my math skills in the library.' Come to find out, I did when I started ordering books!"

"I remember Miss Ruppertsberg saying, 'I'm sorry, we don't have a position for you.' At the time I was staying with a friend, or she was staying with me, and I got home, and she said, 'Oh, you got a call from the Library.' I said, 'I was just there.' And she said, 'I know, they want you to come in tomorrow, they have a position for you.'"

Becky was assigned to the cataloging department located at Donnell. She recalls, "Sydney Marcu was head of Cataloging, and she was a very attractive woman. She had long dark hair, and I was wondering if she was an actress or wanted to be, because she would walk like an actress; her head was always up and she would walk through. Of course, we never spoke to her!" Among the people Becky met in that department was Dorothy Hughes, who was a librarian but also a poet. "She was a very lovely woman, very friendly, and she and I got acquainted. She was from Missouri, but she liked to make you feel at home in

New York. So she would invite me up to her apartment on Riverside Drive for cocktails and dinner.” This is where Becky had her first cocktail and where she met people like Cass Eaton and Lillian Morrison.

By then Becky knew she didn’t want to be a cataloger, so she consulted Dorothy Hughes. Dorothy told her, “I know a career you would be perfect for, you would love, and you can use your acting ability. Become a children’s librarian, because as a children’s librarian you will tell stories to children. I know you will be great at that.”

Becky took that advice, talked to Naomi Noyes, who was the Children’s Specialist in Manhattan, enrolled at the Pratt Institute, and became a trainee. During her time at Pratt—from 1963 to 1966—she worked out of the Manhattan Borough Office and was sent from branch to branch. At Countee Cullen she met Esther Walls and Margaret Robbins and became familiar with the James Weldon Johnson Reference Collection for children. The collection features books on the African American experience and served as the basis of the brochure *Black Experience in Children’s Books*. Miss Robbins “would send me into that room every day to either shelve books or to look around at everything. I came away knowing everything on the list. It was very beneficial to my career. Wherever I went, I knew that collection. You could always help select books for people. So that was quite a wonderful experience.”

In an early assignment at Bloomingdale, Becky met Mary Crawford Poireaux. “She taught me floor work. She was wonderful, very lovely; she had a nice friendly smile. She taught me when the room opens at 2:30, you are there, you’re at your desk, but you don’t sit at your desk. You get up, and whoever walks into the room, you go over and you greet them, ‘Hello, how are you, can I help you?’ And that is your floor work; that’s what you do. You don’t sit, you don’t hide. And consequently, when I was in charge of the floor; I knew what to do. I’d go around to the desks and I’d say to the noisy kids, ‘Do you know how to

whisper?’ Or I’d whisper it, and they’d say ‘Yes.’ [Whispered] ‘So, whisper, OK?’”

“And in the meantime, we were doing the rest of our training. We were learning how to do stories; we learned how to do book talks. This morning I got up and I thought ‘steeped in tradition.’ We were steeped in tradition. How things have changed!”

“At the end of your training, the special event was the Storytelling Symposium, and every trainee had to learn one story that they could tell; we spent a lot of time looking for stories in the *Stories* list! I picked an Irish folktale called “Murdoch’s Rath,” which was about fairies, and shoes, and it was fun. I ended up telling it before Clara Hulton and also Augusta Baker. Everybody had to tell their stories twice in different branches. And I was selected to tell stories at the Storytelling Symposium. Many people were not chosen, but everybody went, and that was a very, very traditional program. It was held at West New Brighton on Staten Island, and we all got up very early on that day and took the ferry out to Staten Island. The branch was always decorated with flowers from gardens belonging to Staten Island staff members. After the audience sat down, they had us storytellers walk in last. Of course, nobody knew who the storytellers were going to be until that moment. The other storytellers that year, 1967, were Mary K. Conwell, Sue Hummel, and Bertha Parker. There was always an experienced guest storyteller, and that year it was Pura Belpré.”

Becky recalls that when Clara Hulton introduced her, she said that “Murdoch’s Rath” was a story Becky’s Irish grandfather told to her when she was young. But Becky says that was a story! “My grandfather did not tell me any stories, but I got up and I told my story.” Becky also remembers her search for a proper dress. “Well, this was the year when short skirts came in style. And a friend and I went to the Village to our favorite store, and we bought two. Mine was paisley, purple and greens; it was very full, and it flared, and it was very short. I don’t know how I got enough nerve to wear this, but I did. No one ever said anything

about that short dress, except many years later, I mentioned it to Despina Croussouloudis, and she said, “We all noticed the length of your dress!”

After she was a fully qualified children’s librarian, Inwood was her first assignment. Kate Todd was the senior children’s librarian just before she became president of the Union. “Mary Gladys Pieper was the branch librarian, and Edna Canozzer was the first assistant. Willa Feeke was there for a while; Mrs. Prussin was the senior clerk. “So, I was at Inwood 1968 to 1972, still learning how to be a children’s librarian.” It was during that time that Becky met George Koppelman, who would become her husband.

“Then Jefferson Market Regional [children’s] librarian, Pam Brown, was leaving and her position was advertised. By this time, I was married, and we lived in the Village. It was [an] exciting place; there were always things going on at Jefferson Market. I applied and I got the position. I was there at Jefferson Market from 1973 to 1975, when I went on maternity leave. Phil Gerrard was head librarian, Richard Lynch was his assistant, Paul Schmidt was reference; Gretchen Haseltine was senior clerk. That was where I met Beryl Eber; she was YA. On the weekends someone would have a party. Frequently, George and I would go and people would be talking about the Library or whatever, and Alan Pally used to come down. I do remember it was a very hippy neighborhood. Although we were open early on Saturday mornings, no public came into the branch until twelve o’clock or after. People just didn’t get up early around there. But it was an interesting public. The kids were very nice; some of them were very sophisticated. One girl who was between ten and twelve—I was expecting by that time—came in and she said, ‘Oh, you could find out whether you’re going to have a boy or a girl. You just go to your doctor,’ and I thought, ‘Who is this kid?’”

“Everybody had to go into the local parks, and, of course, we always went to summer storytelling [at the] Hans Christian Andersen statue in Central Park. Marilyn Iarusso would coordinate that. She’d always

come in a van with the sound equipment; you couldn’t be heard if you didn’t have sound equipment. And they’d have to pull out the chairs. She would invite different children’s librarians, and we’d sit on the benches and wait for our turn, and then we’d tell stories.



In these photos, that’s me right in front of Hans, and you can see a camp group. We always seemed to have a good group. Things they don’t do anymore...”

I took maternity leave from Jefferson Market. After the two years of leave, I felt like I wanted to work

part-time so I could still be home part-time with our son Sam when he was young. Mr. Roziewski said, ‘Well, we normally do not have part-timers, but you are on maternity leave, and we have to give you a position.’ So, I came back as a part-time librarian. That was in 1977 right after the fiscal crisis. Many new children’s librarians had been [laid] off. So they were happy to have me back. They put me at Aguilar because it was open only three days a week. I worked two-and-a-half days there, and, believe me, I put in five days’ worth of work in those two-and-a-half days. At that time Carol Kruus was branch librarian; Joanne Rosario was the young adult librarian; Joan Neal was senior clerk.

We used to have guest storytellers, and Pura Belpré came. She had worked at Aguilar, but she was a little older at that time. She loved to come into Aguilar and tell stories because that had been her branch. I remember one time she came, and she said, ‘I’m a little sad.’ ‘Why are you a little sad?’ ‘Well, they don’t use me as much as they should. I can tell stories; I can do that.’ She was the first Puerto Rican librarian in the system, and that’s how she started her career. She brought her stories to the United States to tell. *Pérez and Martina* was one of her more famous books, and *Once Upon a Time in Puerto Rico* is a collection of stories. I just happened to really catch up with her late, but she was wonderful.”

One of the highlights of Becky’s time at Aguilar was a visit by Brooke Astor. “Brooke Astor and Elizabeth Rohatyn came with Mr. Holmgren and Pauline Singletary.

And they wanted to hear a story. So, they said, ‘Can’t you do storytelling?’ It was summer. So, as you see below, I found three kids who were in the library, and I said, ‘Please come over and listen to stories.’”



“I told ‘Sody Sallyratus,’ which was one of my favorite stories. But I remember being very nervous to be telling it, and I fear I told it very quickly. I was even using my hands, which we were taught not to do!”

Aguilar was to be closed for painting about the time that Becky was ready to become a full-time librarian, and she was sent to Fort Washington where she met Estelle Friedman and Tom Dickinson. Then she was transferred to Central Children’s Room when it was in a staffing transition. But then Bloomingdale became available. “I lived in the neighborhood, and I’d heard so many wonderful things about it. I knew it was a fantastic place.” Becky gives great compliments to Regional Librarian Telza Gardner for her training and sage advice.



The photo on the previous page (bottom right) was taken in the Bloomingdale staff room. From left to right: Terry Middleton, Cynthia Mustafa, Jennine Porta, Telza Gardner, Becky, and Carol Reisner.

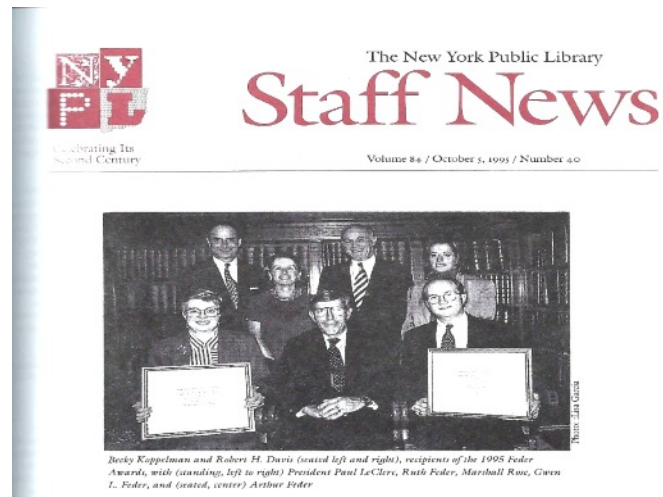
“The kids were great and the parents were involved. I started getting new people.” By the time Becky retired from Bloomingdale, children she watched grow up were coming in with their children. “It was really great.”

Highlights of Becky’s time as a children’s librarian were the training sessions she took part in at the Early Childhood Resource and Information Center (ECRIC). Among the programs she did as a result of this training were ones for teen mothers from both West Side and Brandeis High Schools. One of the teachers from Brandeis High School, told Becky that, as a result of the programs, “The young mothers often boast about the books that they are reading with their children, and then about how much their children love to read.” Becky developed another program, called Read-to-Me, with Susan Straub of the Teachers & Writers Collaborative, which involved reading with babies. “There’s nothing like showing a baby a book and having that face, the eyes, staring at the book—staring at you.



In 1995, Becky received the Bertha Franklin Feder Award for Outstanding Service in Librarianship. “I was the first person from the branches who was so honored, and also the first children’s librarian. Each of us received a plaque and a check for \$1000 dollars.” In true Becky fashion, she still has the plaque but had

no recollection of the check until she saw it again in this article in *Staff News*.



After Telza Gardner’s retirement and about a year before her own retirement, Becky took a step up and became supervising assistant branch librarian at Bloomingdale under the new Regional Librarian Lina Podles. Becky enjoyed the opportunity to spread her wings and try new things, but she had been with the Library thirty-eight years and decided it was getting to be time to retire. So in 2001, that’s exactly what she did. Of course, retirement to Becky meant getting involved with the NYPL Retirees Association and eventually becoming the Association’s second resident. But that’s another story...



George and Becky Koppelman, January 2023, in Savannah, Georgia.

A VISIT TO OUR WEBSITE FEATURING

BECKY KOPPELMAN'S PEOPLE PAGE

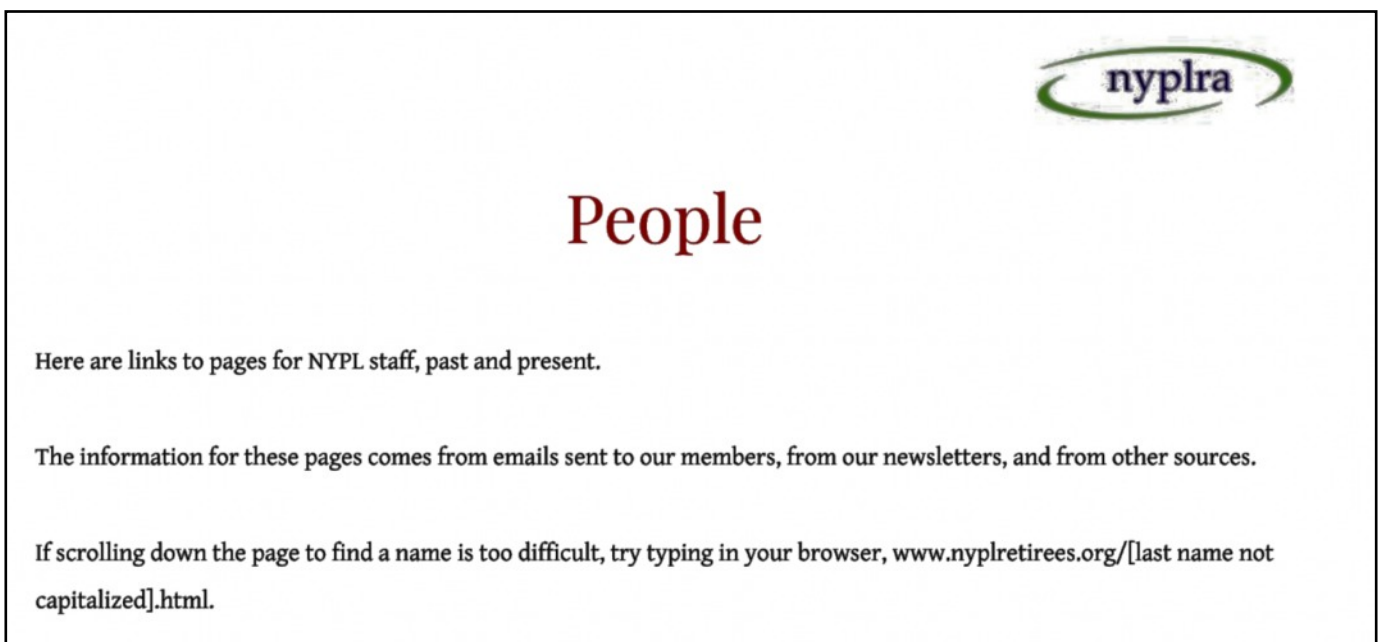
If you visit our website, www.nyplretirees.org, you will see a list of web pages you can visit. You can see below the view as seen on a computer; the view on a phone is different



Some pages are very current, such as the NYC Medicare Advantage Plan and the Upcoming Events pages. Some are about the lives of NYPL staff and the history of our organization. These pages include the Oral History Project, the Newsletters, the Photos, and the People pages.

We know only a bit about who uses the website. From a third to half of the visits to the site are by people who have not visited the site before. Many of the viewers come to our website from search engines, most often from Google.

You can visit the People page by clicking on “People” in the box shown above. On the People page you will see a long list of names; over 1,300 people are listed.



Scroll down the People page until you reach the listing for Becky Koppelman.

When you click on the link “Becky Koppelman,” you will see her page and links to places on our site with more about her.

Ellen KOHL

Becky KOPPELMAN

Margarethe KORTENBEUTEL

Below is the Becky Koppelman page.

Becky KOPPELMAN

See photo in the [Lighthouse Museum](#) album.

See photo in the [Asia Society](#) album.

See photo in the [Harlem Lunch](#) album.

See *New York Public Library Retirees Newsletter, Issue 48*, pages 2, 3, 20

See *New York Public Library Retirees Newsletter, Issue 47*, pages 2, 7, 22.

See *New York Public Library Retirees Newsletter, Issue 46*, pages 2, 20.

If you click on the link, “Lighthouse Museum,” you will come to one of our Photo pages.

There were many photos taken at our group events, but the time, the effort, and skill it takes to add them to the website means few have been added.

But first, look at the instructions for viewing photos on the Photo pages.

When you visit an album, you will see a thumbnail of a photo which shows only a portion of the full photo. Click on the first photo. You will see the full photo and below it a caption listing the people in the photo. Click on the arrow that appears on the photo. This leads you to full-sized views of the other photos in the album.

There are nine photos on the National Lighthouse Museum Tour page. The bottom three of the nine photos are shown below. Becky is in the last photo. When you click on the ninth photo, you will see that photo enlarged.



National Lighthouse Museum Tour October 6, 2017





When you go back to the Becky Koppelman page, you can link to any of a long list of newsletters in which she is mentioned. If you go to the bottom issue, Issue 17, Spring 2004, Becky is mentioned on pages 3 and 6 of that issue. On the third page, you will find her activity as our Social Committee chair; on the sixth page, her personal Retiree News item. Unfortunately, the pages aren't numbered in early newsletters.

New York Public Library Retirees Association Newsletter

Spring 2004

Issue No. 17

FUTURE SOCIAL EVENTS

The social committee members have been busy planning exciting outings for our membership for the 2004-05 season. The grand event in October will be a full day's trip to Kykuit, The Rockefeller Estate in historic Hudson Valley for a tour of the house and gardens. Kykuit is a splendid villa with spectacular views and beautiful gardens. In February, we plan on going to the new and expanded Dahesh Museum on Madison Avenue at 57th St. In June we will travel to Queens to visit the home of the great jazz musician Louis "Satchmo" Armstrong for an entertaining tour. Finally we have decided to shift gears and try a German-American restaurant for our Holiday Dinner in January. The Silver Swan Restaurant is located at 41 East 20th St. in Manhattan and is said to be a "delicious" experience.

We hope these outings will pique your interest and if you haven't joined us before, please do so now. You are welcome to bring friends. And if you have great ideas for outings and entertainments please let us know, we are always looking for new adventures. Dates, times, and specifics will be finalized in early fall. So look for Retirees Events in the Staff News, our special mailings, or on our Web site, <http://home.earthlink.net/~pbookhout/nyplra.html>. Comments or Questions can be answered by Burt Abelson at 718-852-5884 or Becky Koppelman at 212-874-6199 or e-mail at blekopp@hotmail.com.

Becky Koppelman

BECKY KOPPELMAN: Since retiring, I have been enjoying art classes at the 92nd St. Y. I started with drawing classes and am now completely immersed in water color painting. It's wonderful fun and I am learning a lot. One of the results is that my husband and I now take full advantage of the NY art scene, going to museums and galleries regularly. Other things we enjoy are attending book fairs, musical concerts, dance, etc. We are also becoming birders, watching them especially when we go upstate to the country. To keep up with library friends, we get together frequently for lunch or dinner. I continue to be interested in Children's Library Services and have been giving Story hour Programs in some of the branches. It keeps me in touch with staff members, as well as reminds me how much children love stories and the library.

Now for your own adventure, visit the pages of former colleagues and friends.

If you have any comments about the website, problems using it, or find errors, please let us know. You may reach our website manager, Polly Bookhout, at pcbookh@mac.com.

RETIREE NEWS

DAVID BEASLEY

I issued two books recently. (1) *Operations of the Army under General Wolfe; the Battle for Quebec*, and (2) *Canadian Authors You Should Know*.

CANADIAN AUTHORS YOU SHOULD KNOW (ISBN:978-0-915317-62-2) \$25

Major John Richardson, whom I brought out of the forgotten past in my biography *The Canadian Don Quixote; the Life and Works of Major John Richardson, Canada's first novelist*, remains for me a work in progress. I begin this volume with essays concerning his works and activities, which I discovered after the 2nd edition appeared in 2004. Of the other authors I selected, Herman Whitaker, Wyndham Lewis and Thomas Costain lived in either England or the United States; Frederick Philip Grove, from Germany, lived by necessity in Manitoba; Malcolm Lowry, from England, became a domiciled Canadian; Norman Newton, born Canadian, lived in British Columbia; Jaimie Brown, a Canadian, eventually practised his artistry in England, and I, born Canadian, spent 40 years out of the country before returning to a greatly improved art scene. These essays address the writings as well as the personalities of the authors and thus may show how the one influenced the other. (Sept 2023)

OPERATIONS OF THE ARMY UNDER GENERAL WOLFE; THE BATTLE FOR

QUEBEC by Adj-Gen. Richard Bullock, with John Richardson's "*A Canadian Campaign*" (War of 1812, Right Division), Richardson's "*Recollections of the West Indies*" (experiencing a slave society in Grenada and Barbados, 1818), and David Beasley's "*In Search of Richardson's Spain*" (ISBN: 978-0-915317-61-5), \$20. Bullock fought alongside the teen-age Richardson in the Right Division of the Army in the War of 1812. In 1844, he wrote this description of the battles to take Quebec and attempts to retake it, *OPERATIONS OF THE ARMY UNDER GENERAL WOLFE; THE BATTLE FOR QUEBEC* by which Richardson printed in his Kingston newspaper *The Canadian Loyalist*. David Beasley reprinted it as a contribution to Canadian history, as it seems not to have been noticed. Beasley included the Richardson

articles which he had published but had gone out of print. (August 2023)

JULIE CUMMINS

My new book, *Remarkable Women of the Finger Lakes*, came out on November 20th. It profiles twenty mostly-forgotten women who made their mark on women's—and American—history.

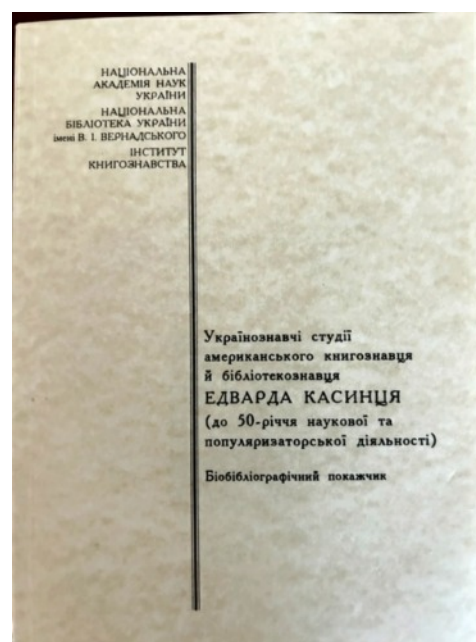
ESTELLE FRIEDMAN

"It was the morning of June 20, and I awoke, as usual, at about 7:30 AM and turned on WQXR, as usual. I was wandering about the apartment when, at 8:00 AM, the announcer said that he had a request from a listener, Wilma Friedman, to wish her mother, Estelle Friedman, a happy 96th birthday. I stood there in shock as I heard these good wishes from Wilma and from the announcer. What a way to begin my 96th year!

EDWARD KASINEC

This bio-bibliography on the 50th year of my Ukrainica research and publishing was compiled by Lyudmila Shpileva, just retired NYPL librarian. There is a record in the online catalog.

The translation of the title is *Ukrainian Studies of the American Bookman and Librarian Edward*



Kasinec (on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of his scholarly and popularizing activity: a bibliography.) It was published by the National Library of Ukraine.

RAY MARKEY

Immediately after my retirement in January 2005, I moved to Hawaii. Waikiki is a lovely place to live. Besides enjoying the weather and Hawaiian culture, I have tried to remain politically active. Twice a week for three years, until COVID, I demonstrated outside the Trump International Hotel in Waikiki. I am on the Leadership Council of Indivisible Hawaii. Every so often, I moderate a program on Zoom called "Let's Talk Politics with Ray."

I am currently working with a group called Labor for Traditional Medicare. We are opposed to Mayor

Adams and the Municipal Labor Committee's plan to replace our Medicare coverage with a Medicare Advantage Plan. We are asking former officers and activists from Local 1930 and other municipal unions to sign a letter in opposition to Mayor Adams' proposal. We will use this letter to publicize our cause, using ads, social media, press conferences, etc. Interested retirees can contact me:

Ray Markey
Former President, Local 1930
RMARKEY527@aol.com
845-729-9757

NEW HUGUENOT BRANCH LIBRARY

In what will be a far cry from the original tiny building on Huguenot Avenue that housed the Huguenot Branch, a brand new state-of-the-art building is planned. The original building was open only two days a week for a few hours. The rest of the time, people could use the tiny Prince's Bay building. Today the building that housed the Huguenot branch is a screen repair shop, pictured here.

Park Library is a building also on Huguenot Avenue but several blocks away. It is pictured on the next page. It has a handicapped ramp and a book drop in the front. It does have a bathroom inside. There is a Children's Room on the lower level with office space and a small program room. There are a few computers. The Adult and Teen sections and the circulation desk are on the main level. Here, too, are a few computers and a staff room.

Parking is lacking. That is a complaint for this automobile-using public.

The new building (pictured on next page) will be in a more accessible spot. There will be ample parking, more computers, and dedicated space for outdoor programming and community events. According to NYPL officials, construction is slated to begin this spring and to last for about eighteen months. The new building will be located on Woodrow Road, next to the Woodrow Shopping Plaza, approximately one mile from the current location. The 7,500 square foot single-level branch will feature a number of dedicated parking spaces as well as double the number of seats for programs and twice the number of computers. The present Huguenot location will remain open while the new branch is under construction.

The present branch, located at 830 Huguenot Avenue near a busy entrance ramp for the Korean War Veterans Parkway at the corner of Drumgoole Road, is a popular site. An Italian Culture Club meets there regularly, and the branch is frequented by many local parents and children. City Councilmember Joseph Borelli (R-South Shore) earmarked \$1 million in funding for the new branch.



The original building had no bathroom facilities on site. However, there was an arrangement with the adjacent Huguenot Reformed Church to permit staff to use the facilities there.

The next and present location of the Huguenot



Current Huguenot Park Library

As you can see by the photos, the many windows will let in lots of light. Outside there will be a bike rack in addition to the parking spaces for cars.



Architect's rendering of the interior and exterior of the new Huguenot Library.



RETIREE RECOLLECTIONS

ROSE MARIE O'LEARY RECALLS HER DAYS AT THE MERCANTILE LIBRARY

I retired from the NYPL in 1984 and was happily at home when, in 1988, I received a telephone call from the director of the Mercantile Library asking whether I would consider working there for two weeks while someone went on vacation. Unbeknownst to me, one of our readers at Hudson Park was on the board of the Merc and had suggested me to fill the gap. So on October 1, 1988, I started there, not knowing anything about the institution, but I soon found out its history. The founding of the Mercantile Library was initiated by the New York Chamber of Commerce, which placed newspaper ads in November of 1820. It asked merchant clerks to meet at a coffee shop to discuss the organization of the library. It was to be based on Boston's Mercantile Library, created earlier that year. The purpose of the new organization was to provide the city's growing population of clerks with an alternative to what were considered immoral entertainments and other vices of the city. The fee was to be one dollar a year.

In its early years, the library moved to various locations in lower Manhattan. There were frequent lectures by speakers, including Ralph Waldo Emerson and Oliver Wendell Holmes.

By 1853, the library had over 4,000 members and over 30,000 volumes. In 1854, the Library moved again, this time uptown to the old Astor Opera House on Lafayette Street, located between Astor Place and East 8th Street. The Opera House had closed its doors due to the riots of 1849 and was sold for \$140,000. At this location, the library offered classes and public lectures, including ones by Frederick Douglas, William Thackeray, and Mark Twain. Membership at this period reached 12,000 while the library amassed 120,000 volumes, making it the largest circulating library in the United States. In 1891, the library tore down the old opera house and replaced it with an eleven-story building. It was to remain the base for library operations, which included seven branches, until 1920 when it relocated to a rented space where it stayed until it moved into its own building at 17 East 47th Street. At that time, the area was the center of the publishing business and not the diamond district it has

become. Here the library maintained 230,000 volumes to serve 3,000 subscribers. The library had branches at 147 Broadway and 598 Madison Avenue.

So on October 1, 1988, I started there for my two-week stint. I thought the building was rather overstuffed with clerks and librarians. There was even a charming woman who sat on the third floor and was to be called if anyone showed interest in joining. The building was a narrow one occupying the standard New York building lot of twenty-five feet and was eight stories high, with two basements and a sub-basement. The top two floors were rented to the Hecksher Foundation, a New-York-City-focused organization that provided grants to NYC youth. The first floor contained the charging desk and a comfortable seating area where new books were kept for six months and then moved to a browsing area at the back of the room. They were kept there for ten years, at which time they were moved to closed stacks. Fiction occupied the fourth floor, the sub-basement, and one basement. Non-fiction was housed on the fifth floor with the overflow shelved on the third floor, which also housed the director's office cum board room, the bookkeeper's office, and various other small rooms mostly filled with junk.

While the books were on the first floor, they were shelved, as you might imagine, in the usual way, with fiction by author and non-fiction by Dewey Decimal numbers. Once they left the first floor to go into the stacks, fiction was arranged by title and non-fiction by author. I found this strange indeed. This arrangement had started before the Dewey Decimal System was developed in 1876 and just continued. To change this would have required us to close the library for some time while we rearranged the books. Since the stacks were closed, it concerned only the clerks who had to retrieve them. This was all right except when the Reader's Digest wanted all of Charles Dicken's novels. It was quite a run-around to round them all up. The job was very physical. On the second floor was a lovely members' reading room with Persian carpets, comfortable leather chairs, and current periodicals and newspapers.

At the end of my two weeks, the director asked me to stay, and I readily agreed. I went on vacation in August 1989 and came back to find the board had sent a letter to the membership announcing the closing of

the library in January 1990. All of the staff had been let go except for a very few. I was one of those. A part-time clerk was also kept on. We found out there was no money to buy new books for that year, but funds would be available in 1990. The board then decided to stay open with no new books and to look for a new director. After a long search, they decided on Harold Augenbraum, who had been Assistant Director of the Museum of the City of New York. He was very good with money. In spite of not having an MLS, he knew books better than anyone else I knew. He was personable and funny, and that made it easy to work hard for him. He had a long view of the library's future. Part of it consisted of clearing out lots of useless stuff on the third floor and freeing up spaces which were rented to other nonprofit organizations. The overflow from the non-fiction still took up the middle of the room. Harold called me to his office and asked me to weed the entire collection. I think this had never been done. This weeding would allow all the non-fiction to be shelved on the fifth floor, freeing up a large rental space on the third. I told him I was confident I could do it, but it would take about two years since I had to be at the desk most of the time. There were about 40,000 volumes to begin with; I reduced the number to 25,000.

We had a very good fiction collection, and Harold decided to concentrate on that. He asked me to keep any non-fiction book that had any literary connection. So with that caveat in mind, I started on that Herculean task. The process was this: I would place on a book truck any book that I thought should be discarded, a page would take the truck to Harold's office, he would look them over, keep anything he thought he should, and the rest would be shelved in the sub-basement. I kept anything that had the slightest literary connection, including anything by anyone who had had tea with Carlyle. We had book dealers in to look at the discards, and the remaining were sold from a book truck on the street. A footnote to all of this—when I first started weeding, I was annoyed with some of the books that had been bought in the first place and then had been moved to the stacks. I found nine

books, written in the 1930s, on manure. I think Ralph Borsodi's 1933 *Flight from the City* was very popular and influenced the Depression population. Scott Nearing's books also helped fuel the fire. I retired from the Merc after seventeen unexpected and enjoyable years. Harold was offered the position of executive director of the National Book Foundation, a position he accepted. The Merc's new director sold the building on 47th Street, moved the library to its new home in Brooklyn, and changed its name to The New York Center for Fiction. The new address is 15 Lafayette Avenue, across from the Brooklyn Academy. It continues as a membership library but contains a café and bookshop, both open to the public. It is beautifully designed, but unfortunately some of the books are stored offsite and take a day or so to retrieve. One interesting thing—the elevator is lined with old handwritten catalog cards!



ALLAN PALLY RECALLS JAMES CAGNEY

Happy Birthday James Cagney. On a freezing, icy January night in 1982, I was James Cagney's bodyguard. We were hosting the National Board of Review's awards presentation at the Performing Arts Library, and one of my assignments was to protect him from the paparazzi. Cagney, only briefly out of retirement to film "Ragtime," received a lifetime achievement award. Mona Washbourne won the supporting actress award for "Stevie."

The photo was taken after the ceremony, which was held in the Main Gallery on the second floor. It was hell getting Cagney through the paparazzi! Lauren Bacall shouted at them, "Why don't you leave him alone, he's an old man!"

Cagney and I both began our careers as pages for The New York Public Library. East 91st Street, between Second and Third Avenue, near where he grew up, was named James Cagney Place in 1991. My mother was born at home on East 91st Street, between First and York.



"YOUNG, UNMARRIED, IN NEED OF HOUSING"

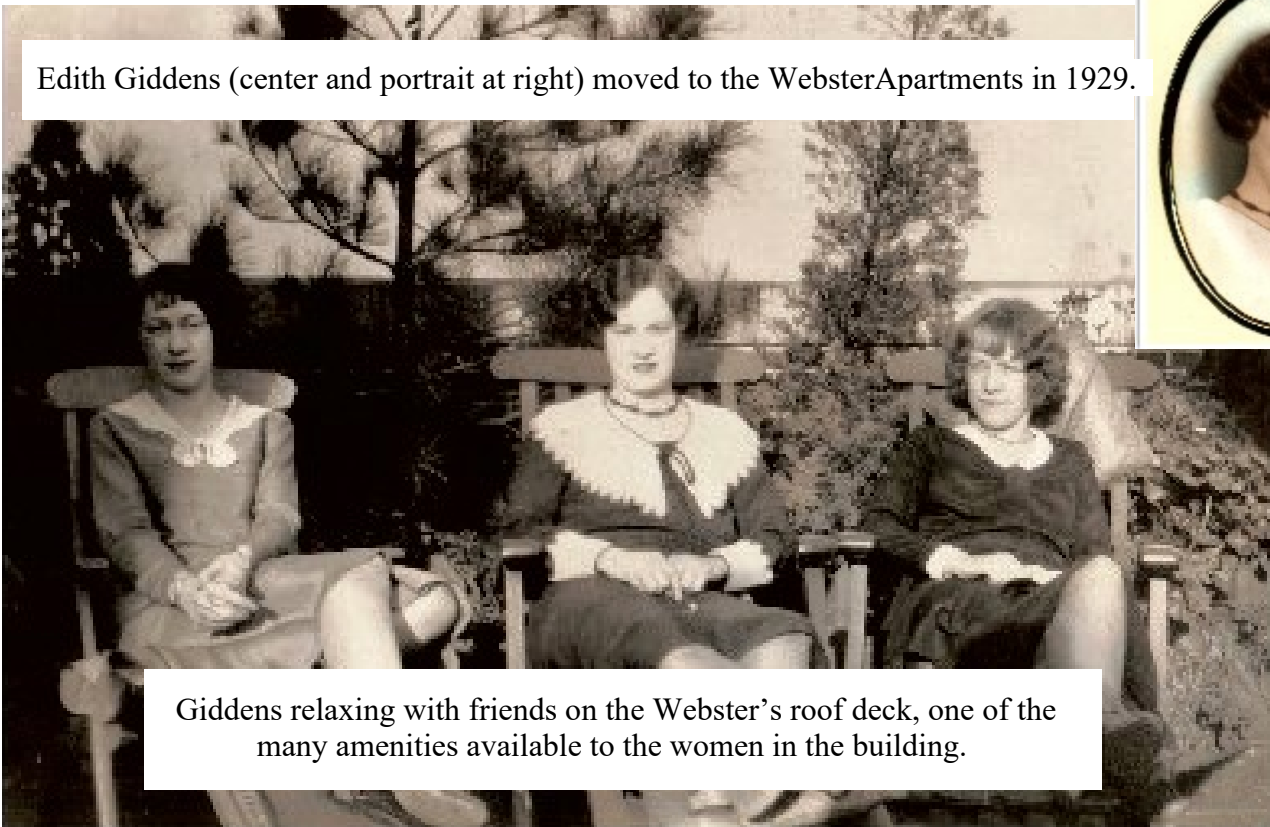
WEBSTER APARTMENTS BUILT 100 YEARS AGO AS HOMES FOR SINGLE WOMEN WHO STARTED HITTING THE CITY'S WORKFORCE

This is the title of an article by Ellen Moynihan, published in the *New York Daily News* on November 20, 2023. It tells of brothers Charles and Josiah Webster, cousins of R.H. Macy. Charles died in 1916, leaving money to benefit the city's single women by building this residence. Much of the article speaks about Edith Giddens, one of the women who lived in the Webster Apartments in her early 30s from 1929 to 1931. She worked at The New York Public Library typing up index cards for the card catalog. "She used to talk about the Webster as if royalty lived there, like it was a special club," says her granddaughter. The building originally had a dance and lecture hall, a lounge and a library, and a roof deck in addition to 360 bedrooms. There were also an on-site dietician, nurse, chef, and housekeeper.



The original building at 34th St. and 10th Ave. In Manhattan

Edith Giddens (center and portrait at right) moved to the Webster Apartments in 1929.



Giddens relaxing with friends on the Webster's roof deck, one of the many amenities available to the women in the building.

OUR ZOOM BOOK TALK

By Estelle Friedman

On October 11, we were privileged to present a book talk, via Zoom, by the noted historian, full professor at NYU, and friend of my daughter since 7th grade, Martha Hodes. Her book, *My Hijacking*, was an editor's choice in the *Sunday Times Book Review*. Although Martha has written many books and articles and has lectured around the world, she was never able to write or talk about this experience. Fifty years ago, twelve-year-old Martha and her thirteen-year-old sister were returning home from Israel after spending the summer with their mother, who lived there, when their TWA plane was hijacked by the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP).

The first question I asked her was whether she was frightened when she saw them wiring the plane with explosives. She claimed she was not but that her sister was. Martha had kept a diary at that time, but when she re-read it, she discovered that she had not recorded all the incidents that happened. I asked her what happened to the crew and how did she get in touch with them? Was she able to contact some of the other passengers after all this time? How did she go about reconstructing her experience? She explained all of this to us.

Martha was just starting seventh grade at Hunter College High School, and although she started six days late and her friends knew about the hijacking, no one asked her about it. At that time, the idea was not to mention it and to try to forget it had ever happened.

When Martha started to write about her experience, she found that she remembered some events and forgot others. One event she remembered vividly was the co-pilot being escorted to the bathroom by one of the hijackers with a gun held to his neck. She tried, with some success, to get in touch with some of the other passengers and slowly reconstructed the events. She found clips of newsreels and went to various archives. In the meantime, her father, who was a choreographer and dancer with Martha Graham (after whom she was named) was keeping everything inside himself, refusing to discuss this with anyone. As Martha was writing the book, she inserted lines from *The Little Prince* that seemed to fit in with what she was experiencing.

After a week, when they were finally released and brought to a hotel in Amman, her sister said "Now I am going to thank God and have a bath." They were soon flown home to New York.

Martha was articulate and full of background information. It was a most memorable event.

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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>