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NEWSLETTER OF THE PROVIDENCE ATHENÆUM



MESSAGE FROM THE BOARD PRESIDENT, CANDY ADRIANCE

What does a small primary school library in a rural village in Kenya have in common with the Providence Athenæum? I found myself contemplating that question on a recent trip to the village of Mwea, Kenya. For ten years I was the President of the Mwea Fund, a grassroots, non-profit organization dedicated to improving education in the village. The Mwea Fund raised the money to build a library, the first in the area, and I was recently a guest in the now completed, simply stocked but well-organized room of books.

It was fascinating and even thrilling to feel the excitement of people, young and old, as they walked through the space and realized that they could choose books about whatever subjects they wanted to explore. The site was a peaceful refuge and felt almost sacred as people moved freely, but with a sense of awe, from one section to the

next, browsing through books that for many will offer a whole new world of information. It is open to everyone and consequently has created a wonderful sense of community, and even more importantly, possibility. Everyone sees the power of the library and is excited to have collaborated in support of a place that now feels like the heart of the village. In this “new world” they will experiment with adult education classes and participatory educational workshops.

The Mwea Library may be only two years old, while the Athenæum will celebrate its 178th birthday this year, but supporters of both libraries believe that free access to knowledge, rich cultural engagement, and a spirit of collaboration are vital to the life of a community, thanks in part to the inspirational experience and sense of belonging that our centers of knowledge engender. Despite being from completely different cultures and living 8000 miles apart, people from both libraries venerate the power of knowledge and the importance of making it available to all.

Because of the extraordinary skill, dedication, and work ethic of our Executive Director Alison Maxell and the staff, the Athenæum consistently offers a welcoming, multi-functional, and secure place for people of all backgrounds to read, study, research, and relax. While we proudly claim success in the on-going implementation of our *Vision 2015* Strategic Plan, and while we will

continue to vigilantly oversee and protect the Athenæum’s assets (people, collections, building, endowment), the Board’s core mission will now be to invest in the Athenæum’s continued growth and momentum. It is critical at this juncture that we work to increase support, both financial and through public involvement and stewardship, to give Alison and the staff the added tools they need. Marketing consulting, branding, grant writing, and additional staff are just a few of the areas that we must invest in.



The Mwea Library in 2013

As we work toward this goal, we can draw inspiration from our friends on the other side of the world. I think of the dozens of rural villagers in Mwea, Kenya, who worked together to convince fellow citizens of the importance of a library, then to help raise the essential funds, and ultimately to come together to build their library. Today it stands as proof of the power of vision, collaboration, sacrifice, investment, and commitment. The Mwea people now know, as we do, the responsibility of supporting and caring for an institution that gives back every day, and allows free access to knowledge and a rich exchange of ideas and experiences. In this new year, let us be sure to renew our commitment to our 178-year tradition of supporting our Athenæum, so that it may continue to grow and thrive, and so that it can always be inspirational to those who follow. Thank you for your ongoing investment in its mission - as vital today as it was in those early, aspirational days when the Athenæum, too, was a brand new library.



The Providence Athenæum past...



... and present

MESSAGE FROM THE DIRECTOR OF PROGRAMS AND PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT, CHRISTINA BEVILACQUA

Happy 2014! As someone whose favorite month is January, I realize that I am in a mocked minority, but there is something about the muffled quiet, bleak landscape, and empty calendar of this month in deepest winter that allows the mind to hear its own voice, and dream up the sort of color and adventure that can only come from the imagination. So we invite you to satisfy your wintry keenness by joining us often during the coming months of programs, which we've filled with new ideas and endeavors.

Befitting the Athenaeum's role as Providence's "cultural amplifier," the Salons will continue to feature creative people carrying out intriguing projects in the community, giving you an early, inside look at upcoming projects by Community MusicWorks, Providence Premieres, FirstWorks, and Jane's Walk, among others. As one of the oldest libraries in the state, we are delighted to partner with our book-besotted colleagues at the John Carter Brown Library's Watts History and Culture of the Book Program and the John Russell Bartlett Society to present a two-part mini-festival on the career of the groundbreaking book collector and writer Octave Uzanne. In February, the popular *Cosmology of Conversation* series on the history of the salon will let us eavesdrop on the whisperings of the sphinx-like salonnières of 18th century Rome; a Salon in May will bring in the voices of 20th century Americans.

And we introduce a new series as well, *'What use is the giraffe?' – The Evolution of Science, Society, and Spectacle in the Cosmopolitan 19th Century*, which takes its inspiration from one of the most important and most-viewed items in the Athenaeum's Special Collections, the *Description de l'Égypte*, selected images from which will be included in an accompanying exhibit, *Zarafa: Spectacle of the Giraffe, 1826-1839*, curated by Kate Wodehouse (see page 3). The series, which began in November with a "prequel" Salon on "Egyptomania" by Brown University Assistant Professor of Egyptology Laurel Bestock, takes a giraffe who arrived in Paris in 1827, and uses her experience to highlight the evolving ideas and events of her moment, interpret the world that they created, and look for the traces of that world – and that very giraffe – in our lives today. And the ideas that suffuse this series will find resonance in our collaborative programming with Not About the Buildings and the RISD Museum later in the spring when the Museum's now-under-renovation sixth floor galleries re-open, providing a new home for their popular mummy, Nesmin. Stay tuned!

'What use is the giraffe?' – The Evolution of Science, Society, and Spectacle in the Cosmopolitan 19th Century

In the summer of 1827 a very young giraffe arrived in Paris, a gift to King Charles X from Muhammad Ali, the Pasha of Egypt, who had reason to curry political favor from the ruler of France. The giraffe's first stop in France had been Marseilles, where she had arrived by boat from Alexandria in the fall of 1826, and where she and the two men who had attended her on the voyage – one a Bedouin and one of Sudanese origin – had spent the winter. In late May, with a retinue that included her handlers, along with three cows to provide her with milk, the giraffe set off to walk to the 560 miles to Paris. This precarious undertaking was overseen by one of the most important French naturalists of the day, Étienne Geoffroy Saint-Hilaire, who had made his name 30 years earlier as a member of Napoleon's scientific expedition to Egypt. Geoffroy had also contributed scholarship to the *Description de l'Égypte*, a multi-volume report of the expedition's findings on natural history and science in ancient and modern Egypt; its publication and dissemination between 1809 and 1829 had ignited a blaze of "Egyptomania" – a craze for all things Egyptian – in France and around the world.

The giraffe's journey took 41 days, paced in part to accommodate the increasing and frenzied crowds of thousands, even tens of thousands, of eager spectators that she attracted in towns along the way. Shortly after arriving in Paris she was presented to the King, and thereafter made her home in the Jardin des Plantes, where for over a year she created an unprecedented sensation, sending Parisians into a state of delirious "giraffomania." In her extreme, unknowable otherness and mysterious self-possession, she became the means by which all manner of ideas and desires – cultural, political, and sociological – could be given expression, and she appeared as a character, mouthpiece, and/or image in everything from novels, plays, and philosophical essays to political cartoons to designs for hats, wallpaper, and souvenir sweets. Her celebrity waned after 1830, and during her remaining 15 years she was sought out only, as Balzac noted in an essay on the vagaries of fame, by "nannies with young children, simpletons, and backward provincials." But in a fittingly quiet way, her allure endures, and she is still visited today – albeit in taxidermied form – at the Museum of Natural History in La Rochelle.

Yet, as when she was alive, it is her mystery more than her manifestation that makes her noteworthy today, and a host of scholars and artists are now interpreting her significance across a range of disciplines, including science, history, and the arts. We invite you to meet several of them and learn about their work this spring when we feature a new Salon series, *'What use is the giraffe?' – The Evolution of Science, Society, and Spectacle in the Cosmopolitan 19th Century*, and an accompanying exhibit, *Zarafa: Spectacle of the Giraffe, 1826-1839*.

The question "What use is the giraffe?" in our series title comes from a pamphlet written by Geoffroy Saint-Hilaire. We chose it because in the story of the 19th century's elusive giraffe we will trace the intertwined chronologies of the study of natural history and science, including evolving ideas about the origin of life, racial differentiation, the role of order in the natural and manmade worlds, and the development of sociological theories; the effect of new, applied technologies on travel, communications, international relations, economics, and the craze for crazes, including the craze for ever more dazzling public spectacles that called into question a person's ability to rely on direct experience to distinguish what was "real" from what was not; as well as the the political responses that all these developments brought about.

Perhaps best of all is that in preparing for this series and exhibit we have stumbled upon traces of the mysterious giraffe in the very collections of the Athenaeum itself. One of our most beautiful and important holdings is our copy of the *Description de l'Égypte*.

(continued on page 5)

FROM THE COLLECTIONS LIBRARIAN, KATE WODEHOUSE

Zarafa: Spectacle of the Giraffe, 1826 - 1839, on view 2/7-5/31

As a complement to the Salon series 'What use is the giraffe?' – *The Evolution of Science, Society, and Spectacle in the Cosmopolitan 19th Century*, the exhibition *Zarafa: Spectacle of the Giraffe, 1826-1839* will document the historical, political, and social/cultural influence of the Pasha of Egypt's gift of a giraffe to King Charles X of France in 1826. The "bel animal du roi" wintered in Marseille where she was met by the natural historian Geoffroy Saint-Hilaire, and escorted on foot by an entourage that included several exotic attendants and three cows, on the 560 mile journey to Paris. She created a growing spectacle as crowds gathered along the route to see the first giraffe in Europe in over 300 years, and her image appeared on decorative objects



Ticket to see the giraffe in Paris, circa 1827



Study of the Giraffe given to Charles X by the Viceroy of Egypt, courtesy of the Morgan Library & Museum

like ceramics and wall-paper, influenced hairstyles, and led to paint colors with such names as "belly of giraffe." The exhibition culminates in the arrival of the first giraffe or "cameleopard" onto American soil, which was on display in downtown Providence in 1839.

Thanks to the John Hay Library, Brown University, and Nancy Barshter, Childhood Antiques, for loans to the exhibit.

Plus: pop-up exhibits for Salons on...

2/28: Octave Uzanne

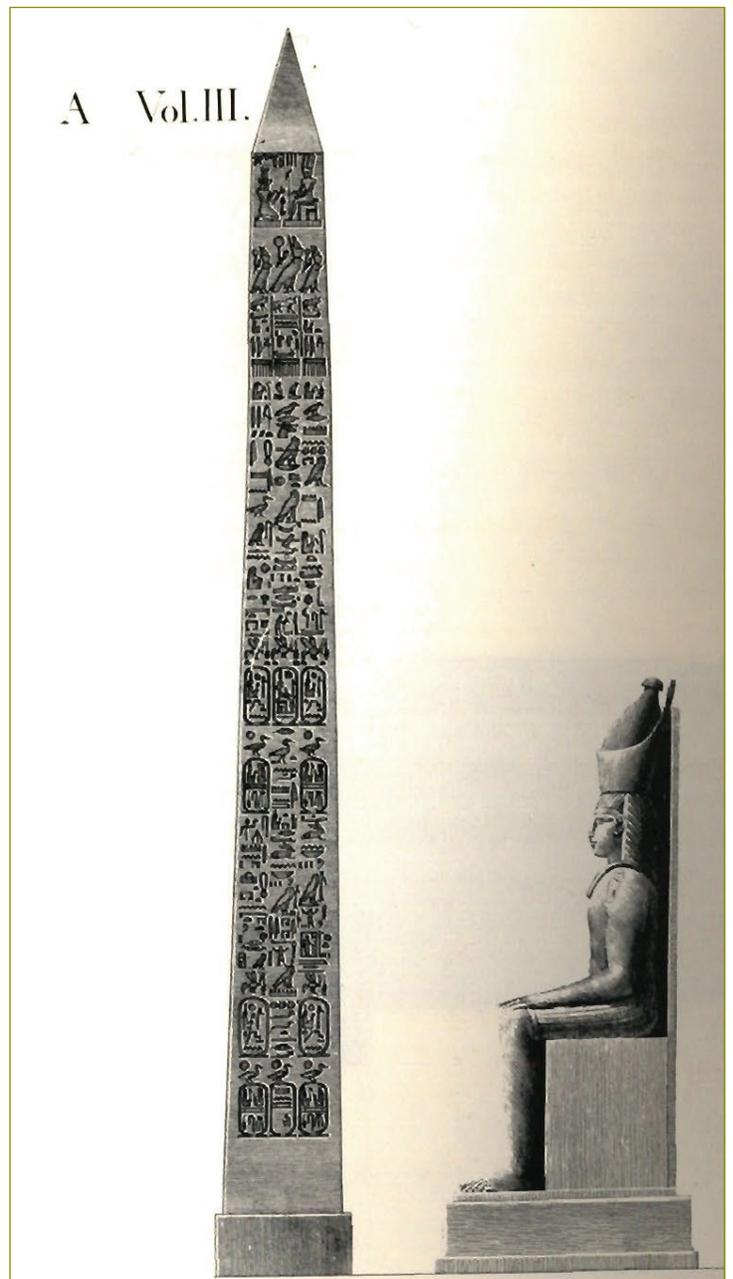
4/11: Paper Dolls Project



Octave Uzanne, Paris, 1886



Max Tilke, *Oriental Costumes: Their Designs and Colors*, London, 1924



Obelisk at Luxor, *Description de l'Égypte*, Paris, 1809-28

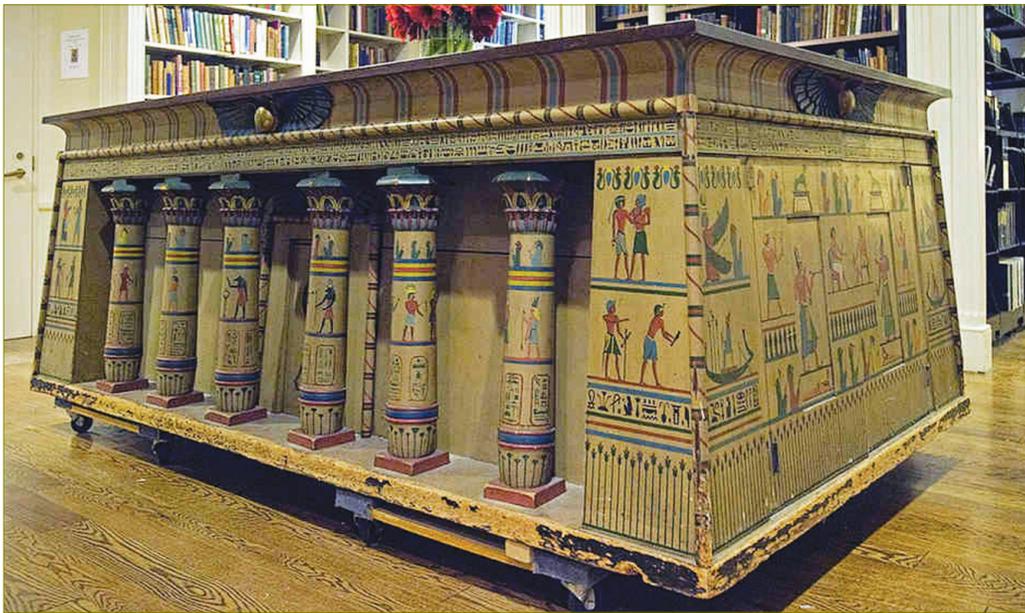
GRANT NEWS - GREAT NEWS! FROM EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, ALISON MAXELL

Thank you **Ida Ballou Littlefield Memorial Trust** for \$5,000 in support of expanded programming initiatives. This important funding enables us to provide the wide range of programs and services that have become the Athenaeum experience.



And thanks to a \$5,730.45 grant from the **Mabel T. Woolley Trust**, that program experience will be even better, when we install an “assistive listening system” this spring. Mindful of the importance of equal access and the need to look at “sound” solutions that would take into account our members and guests with hearing impairments, we’ve spent the last six months researching available options and have found an “Induction Loop System” that we believe will address all our needs. So, what is an Induction Loop System? Specifically designed for the difficult audio environment of public spaces, these patented assistive listening systems serve an unlimited number of people within “listening areas.” Induction Loop Systems consist of a thin wire that is placed around the listening area, a special amplifier, and microphones. Speech signals are amplified and circulated through the loop wire. The resulting magnetic energy field is detected and amplified by the “telecoil” or telephone switch circuitry common to many hearing aids, cochlear implants, and induction loop receivers. The user of a telecoil-equipped hearing aid simply switches to “T” to receive a direct audio transmission from the podium, stage, speaker, film, or any audio input. The end result is a high quality amplified reproduction of the original speech signal. Intelligibility is greatly increased because the distance between the speaker and the listener(s) is bridged and background environmental noise is reduced. Induction Loop Systems are compatible with almost 50% of hearing aids currently being dispensed in the USA. But for those without compatible hearing aids, lightweight induction loop receivers with headphones will also be available. Going from basically no sound system to a modern system complete with special amplifiers, receivers, and wireless lapel microphones promises to be a vast improvement for all. Special thanks to member **Jean Lewis Keith** for being both inspiration and catalyst in this effort!

Thanks to a \$5,000 award from **The Bafflin Foundation**, the Athenaeum is now able to update our existing plumbing to comply with the **Providence Water Supply Board’s Cross Connection Control Program**. The work to be completed this spring involves the design and installation of mandated backflow protectors. These backflow prevention assemblies are used to protect potable water supplies from contamination or pollution due to backflow.



From enhanced sound to improved sightlines...there is more to share! With weekly Salon audiences now reaching and often exceeding 100 people, we spent the month of January looking at ways to maximize the seating capacity of the Reading Room. With the expert assistance of Athenaeum member **Wendy MacGaw’s Arts Management Services** and **Keough Construction**, we were able to find an interim solution. By moving the Egyptian Cabinet (formerly the Salon buffet table) to the **Philbrick Rare Book Room**, we not only increase the Reading Room seating capacity but provide a more appropriate climate controlled, protective environment for this singular piece of art, and it will be displayed to better advantage as well. This change also improves functionality and flow for Salons and programs, as all beverages and food can now be served in the adjacent room, in closer proximity to our caterer’s kitchen. Sightlines from the back of the room are also improved by a simple relocation of our media screen to the far corner of the room. We will of course be looking for feedback from all of you this spring in response to these interim changes and will continue to look at ways to make further improvements.



Athenaeum programs are made possible through major funding support from the RI Council for the Humanities, an independent state affiliate of the National Endowment for the Humanities.



Athenaeum activities are made possible in part by a grant from the RI State Council on the Arts, through an appropriation by the RI General Assembly and a grant from the National Endowment for the Arts.



Our thanks to program season sponsor
Campus Fine Wines
for their generous support.

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(continued from page 2) It is treasured not only for the significance of the work itself, but for what its purchase, made in 1837 as our Benefit Street building was under construction, tells us about the aspirations of the Athenaeum's founders for both the library and the community it would serve. The fact that the giraffe's protector, Geoffroy Saint-Hilaire, was a contributor to the *Description* thrilled us, but we were especially gratified to discover a more direct connection to the giraffe. Bard Graduate Center Assistant Professor Michele Majer, one of the Salon speakers we will feature this spring, wrote an article describing an essay by Balzac, in which he used the giraffe's waning popularity to warn the ultra-royalist Prime Minister, Prince Jules de Polignac, that his power, too, would be fleeting. Balzac was prescient; the essay was written on the eve of the 1830 revolution that would see the government overthrown and the Prince forced into exile. His belongings were eventually sold, including his copy of the *Description*. It was the Prince de Polignac's very copy that the Athenaeum was able to purchase when it came up for auction several years later.

The purchase was arranged by founding member and bibliophile John Russell Bartlett, who then designed and commissioned the Egyptian cabinet that housed the volumes of the *Description* until the library's addition in the 1970s, when they were moved to the new climate-controlled Philbrick Rare Book Room, where they reside today. We still cherish the cabinet, and it is fitting that just as the giraffe exhibit and programming get underway, it will be moved into the Philbrick Rare Book Room, where it will be better protected and can be seen to full advantage. Come view it anew, along with the exhibit on the giraffe; join us for the Salon series, too – and don't miss the host of giraffical activities in the Children's Library this spring, see the full list on our website! We thank Dr. Joseph Chazan for his munificent sponsorship of the series, which was also made possible by the generous support of Susan Jaffe Tane and several friends of the Athenaeum who wish to remain anonymous.

WITH A LOT OF HELP FROM OUR FRIENDS!

Please let these generous businesses, organizations, and individuals know how much you appreciate their investment in our February and March programs and exhibits! Dr. Joseph A. Chazan; Tripp Evans and Ed Cabral; Hope Club; Allen Kurzweil and Françoise Dussart; Nancy Barshter, Childhood Antiques; nickynichtern.com; The Pearle W. & Martin M. Silverstein Foundation; The Peck Building; RI Council for the Humanities; RI State Council on the Arts; Susan Jaffe Tane; Variable Data Printing; Yankee Travel; and several friends of the Athenaeum who wish to remain anonymous. Thanks also to our presenting partners: Brown Bookstore; Community MusicWorks; FirstWorks; Fleet Library at RISD; John Hay Library; John Nicholas Brown Center for Public Humanities and Cultural Heritage; John Russell Bartlett Society; Not About the Buildings; Providence Department of Arts, Culture + Tourism; RI Public Radio; and the Charles H. Watts II History and Culture of the Book Program, John Carter Brown Library.

FROM THE REFERENCE DESK

CAROL TATIAN, REFERENCE LIBRARIAN

Ever wonder how new Reference books appear on our shelves? Well, not much of a secret – I order them, of course. But there is a rationale as to what I look for to order. Since we are especially interested in documenting RI History and American History at the Athenaeum, new reference books in those subjects are always on my radar. And I'm especially attentive to the needs of you, our members. I pay close attention to questions I receive at the Reference Desk and think of these first when I peruse new book reviews. The following lists are new books that we received in October, November, and December, 2013.

RI History

Hidden History of Rhode Island and the Civil War, 2013. R RI COLL. 974.5 G79H

Ratification of the Constitution by the States, Rhode Island, vol. 2, 2013. R RI COLL. 973 J46D

Ratification of the Constitution by the States, Rhode Island, vol. 3, 2013. R RI COLL. 973 J46D

RIMAP Maps: Heritage Trail Guides: R RI COLL. 974.5 R48R

1. *Revolutionary War Forts in Rhode Island Public Parks*, 2012.

2. *Revolutionary War Hospitals in Rhode Island*, 2012.

3. *Revolutionary War Industries in Rhode Island*, 2012.

4. *Revolutionary War Transportation and Communication Systems*, 2012.

American History

Daily Life in the Colonial City, 2013. R 973 K72D

Manifest Destiny & the New Nation (1803-1859), 2 vols., 2013.

(Defining documents in American history) R 973 S34M

Voices of the American Indian Experience, 2 vols., 2013. R 970 S43V

Women of the Constitution; wives of the signers, 2013. R 973 M24W

General Reference

Capital Cities Around the World, 2013. R QUARTO 909 C92C

Ancient Greece; everyday life in the birthplace of Western civilization, 2008. R 938 G37A

The Handy History Answer Book, 2013. R 909 H82H

Smithsonian Music; the definitive visual history, 2013. R FOLIO 780 D67M

Art that Changed the World; transformative art movements and the paintings that inspired them, 2013. R FOLIO 709 J63A

Kovell's Antiques & Collectibles Price Guide, 2014. R 749 K849

Smithsonian Timelines of Science, 2013. R FOLIO 509 D67T

Kill or Cure; an illustrated history of medicine, 2013. R 610 P37K

Complete Guide to Prescription & Nonprescription Drugs, 2014. R615 C738

Smithsonian Earth; the definitive visual guide, 2013. R 550 L83E

The Conquest of the Ocean; an illustrated history of seafaring, 2013. R 910.4 L38C

Reef Life; a guide to tropical marine life, 2013. R 577 C64R

MARK YOUR CALENDARS!

This year's Annual Meeting will be held Wednesday, March 19, 2014 at 6pm in the Reading Room.

Please note the change in day and time. While we have traditionally met on the first Sunday in March, this year the Annual Meeting will follow our regular monthly meeting of the Board of Directors. Business to be conducted that evening includes the President's report, greetings from the Executive Director, the Treasurer's report including financials, other committee reports, and elections. Please join us for an informative evening. Look for more details in our annual membership mailing to arrive in early February.



THE OWLET
 News from The Children's Library
 WINTER 2014

This past fall and early winter in the Children's Library, entertainment was in the air. Family movie nights, the Providence Children's Film Festival Film Club for children, our annual Little Pumpkins Halloween party, an original musical production created and performed by talented students from Brown University, a performance by the RI Philharmonic Music School classical guitar ensemble, and a creative family tree workshop were a few of the highlights of our fall programming.

Thank you to all who have participated in the family activities and to those who shared their talents, making this past season a joy. We look forward to having you all join us for our new programs in the months to come! Happy New Year!

Here's a little of what we're looking forward to:

Wednesdays 1/15 – 2/19, 3:30pm: Ms. Z's Wild and Wonderful Story and Craft Hours for children ages 3 to 5.

Thursdays 2/6 – 5/29, 4 – 5:30pm: Trinity Repertory Company and the Providence Athenaeum present *A Rose by Any Other Athenaeum*: Shakespeare theater classes and final performance for children grades 3 to 5. To become part of this theater adventure contact Jordan Butterfield at jbutterfield@trinityrep.com.

Thursday 2/13 – Sunday 2/23: Providence Children's Film Festival 2014. The PCFF team has been working all year to gather exceptional films from around the world for the whole family! Don't miss our fantastic fifth year! For more information visit pcfri.com.

Sunday 2/23, 2:30pm: *Our World of Nature* series begins with An Amphibian Adventure with Chris Hitchener of the Roger Williams Park Zoo's "My Big Back Yard." We welcome our new programming partners from the Roger Williams Park Zoo! To learn more about Chris and "Our Big Back Yard" visit rwpzoo.org.

Saturday 3/1, 10am: *A World of Music* series presents a family concert with Celtic folk musician Mary King. Visit Mary's web page at celticharpri.com.

Saturday 3/22, 2:30pm: *Our World of Nature* series: Family Partners in Play with Chris Hitchener. An inspired creative play experience for families, including nature craft stations and more!

April: *A World of Music* series presents two family concerts, *The Talking Cello* with Sandy Kiefer and folk musicians *The Whompers*, dates TBA. Find out about the RI Philharmonic Music School and their classes at ri-philharmonic.org.

Due to some wonderful new partnerships there are often surprise programs that pop up on the fly (we just can't say no to spur-of-the-moment fun!). So, if you want to be part of the action and you're not receiving our special Children's Library e-mail notices, give us a call and we will add you our list.

For regularly scheduled story hours and program information visit the Providence Athenaeum Children's page at providenceathenaeum.org.



RI Philharmonic Music School classical guitar students



Growing a family tree



Playtime in the Children's Library

HOURS AND HOLIDAY CLOSINGS

Mon – Thurs: 9am to 7pm

Fri – Sat: 9am to 5pm

Sun: 1 to 5pm

Holiday Closings:

Mon 2/17- Presidents' Day

Sun 4/20 - Easter