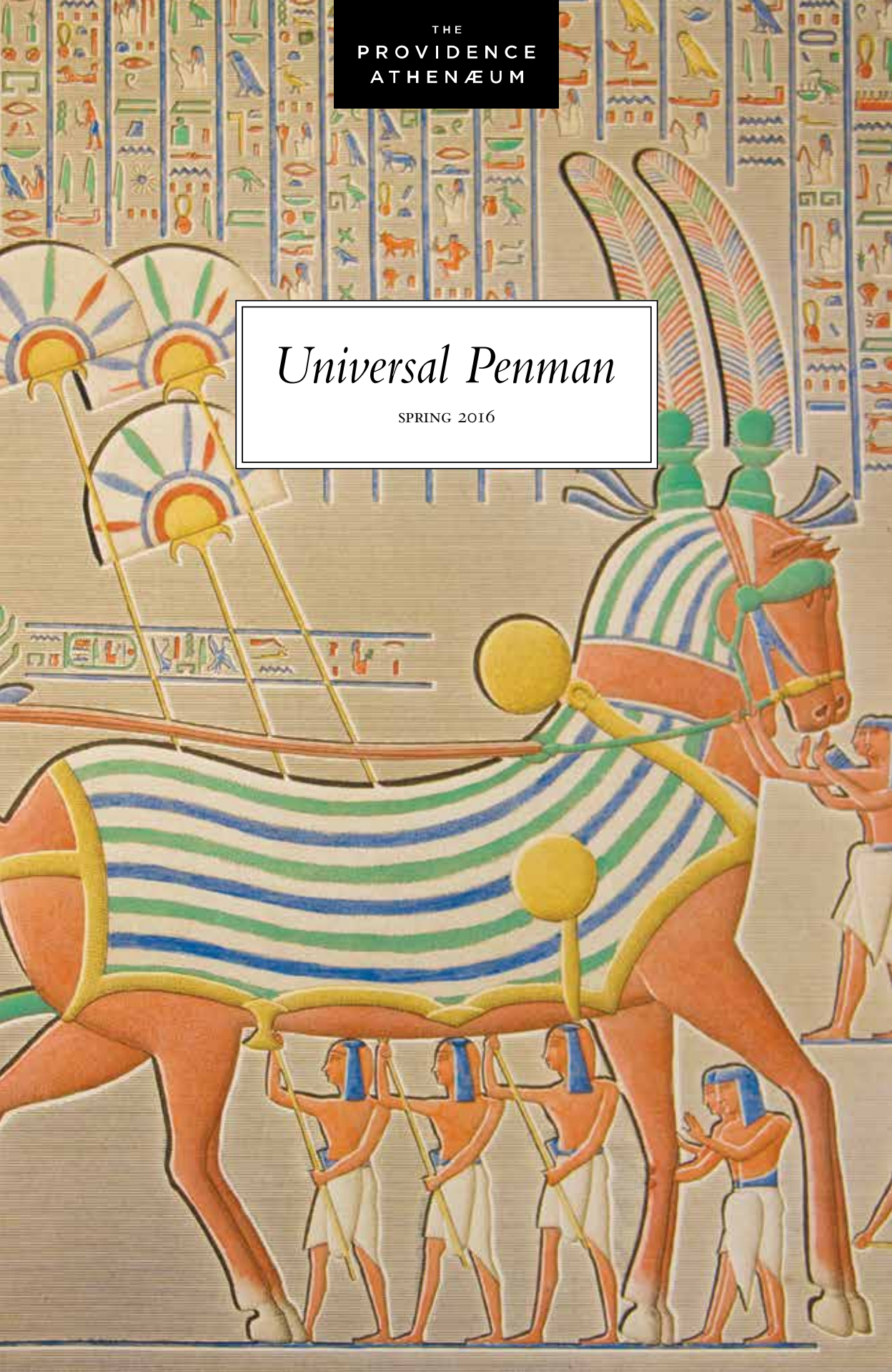


THE
PROVIDENCE
ATHENÆUM

Universal Penman

SPRING 2016



Universal Penman

A Semiannual Publication of
the Providence Athenæum

SPRING 2016



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If You Build It...



Christina Bevilacqua
Director of Public Engagement

On a cold, inauspicious night in February of 2006, the Athenaeum Salon met for the first time. Never having been to a salon ourselves, we weren't exactly certain what the evening would hold – we put out a minimum of publicity and figured we'd see what would happen.

The topic on offer was “The History of Social Conversation,” not the sort of thing to get vast hordes to put on their boots and head out into the waning wintry light at 5pm. Or so I imagined – but 42 people showed up, about ten times as many as we had expected. They drank sherry from tiny glasses, sampled scones, and introduced themselves to one another. They listened avidly to descriptions of conversations in 18th century German coffee houses and 19th century French salons and asked questions about the similarities and differences. The following week they came back and brought friends. And the following week. And the one after that.

Ten years later I am looking ahead but also taking a moment to look back – which is only fitting, as one of the many things I've learned in wrangling a salon for the past decade is that every salon, no matter

where in the world it's been held or in what century, is built on nostalgia – nostalgia for earlier salons, but also nostalgia for its own origins. Salon historian Daniel Harkett, one of the many generous speakers we've featured over the years, was the one who articulated that to me, thus helping me make sense of what I think of as the invisible and indivisible soul of the salon, that inchoate yet characteristic something that threads through each discrete meeting to create the whole. I have a sense of accomplishment when people ask me to confirm (as they do) that the Athenaeum Salon began in the 19th century (it didn't), or even when people tell me that the Athenaeum Salon was “better before.” By “before,” they mean anything from a week ago to ten years ago, because for each person, the salon's reality begins the moment they enter it for the first time, and that iteration becomes the touch




Janin, Jules et al. *Pictures of the French: a series of literary and graphic delineations of French characters*. London: W.S. Orr and Company, 1840.


point for them. So when people describe the Salon to me, they are really describing their own history as a part of it. That is, they are describing the desire to be part of something ineffable yet enveloping. What I have learned over all these years is to recognize that it is also always evolving, and so can never be definitively described or even known. At the heart of the salon impulse is a mysterious concurrence of ritual and risk.

The Athenaeum Salon's inspiration was, indirectly, from Proust (of course!). The Parisian salon life depicted in his work originated in his attendance at the real-life salon of Genevieve Straus. In 2005, her salon was among those celebrated in “The Power of Conversation: Jewish Women and Their Salons,” an exhibit at the Jewish Museum in New York, where I saw it on July 10th – which happened to be Proust's birthday as well as the day before I came to work at the Athenaeum. As I wandered through the rooms I was struck by the aptness of the word “power” to describe the energy still alive in these gatherings of people – despite the fact that the salonnières and their attendees had been gone for decades and even centuries. It was not just the photographs, or the letters or journals on


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display, it wasn't the furniture or the tea sets or even the sherry glasses, although those were all compelling in their way. Rather, the energy came from the images of the disparate people who had populated each salon, with the networks of their cross-pollinating ideas spelled out. With the very simple technology of a regular gathering that included a cross-section of people showcasing ideas and creativity, some signature snacks, and a scribe or two to document ideas in between meetings via letters, diaries, and journals,



different. Providence, even as the sherry and scones are the same as they were in year one. My own excitement continues to come from the opportunity that the Salon creates, in the e-networked world in which we all now live, to connect people in a different way, one that is face-to-face and off the screen. What I look forward to is the further evolution that allows us to bring an ever more diverse group of thinkers in each week, so that while the rituals continue to reassure us each week, the risk continues to challenge our certitude and gets us to open our minds to a new thought, say hello to someone unfamiliar, bring to fruition possibility and further possibility. 

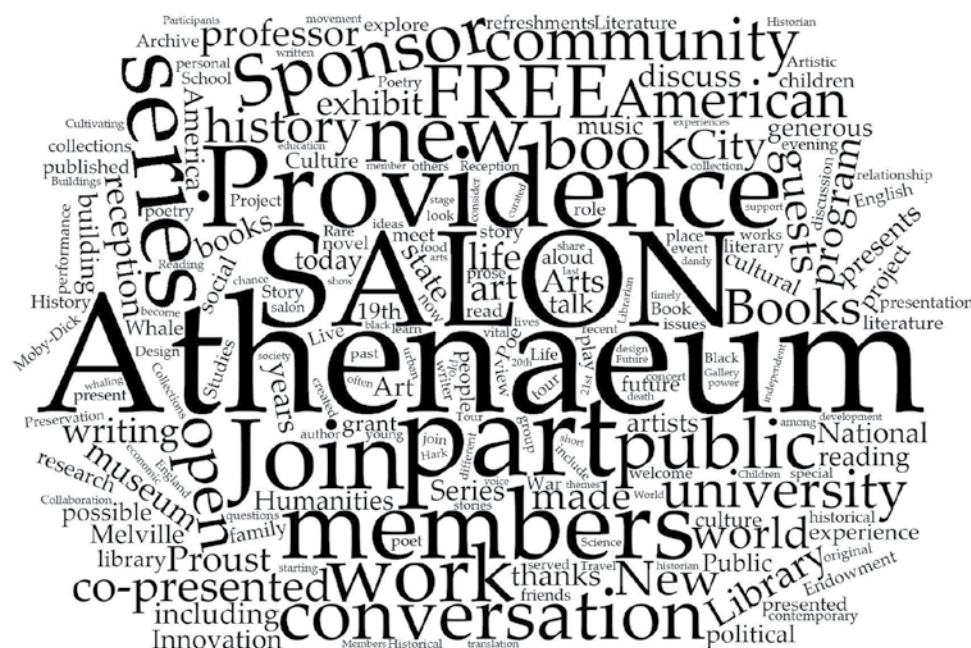
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Kate Wodehouse
Director of Collections & Library Services

John Russell Bartlett was such a man. A self-described “projector” and co-founder of the Athenaeum, Bartlett was a bibliophile, historian, and statesman and was instrumental in getting the fledgling library off the ground. Born in Providence in 1805, he spent much of his youth in Kingston, Ontario where his father established himself as a merchant. After completing his modest education at 18 years old, Bartlett returned to Providence to work with his uncle William Russell in his dry-goods store. Within a few years Bartlett had taken a position with the Bank of North America, working closely with Cyrus Butler, one of the wealthiest and most influential men in Providence. It was during this time that Bartlett conceived of the Athenaeum, and persuaded Butler to financially support the project which was to

Before 1831, the only publicly accessible library in Providence was the Providence Library Company which was founded in 1753 by some of Rhode Island's leading, and most wealthy, figures. But with the city's incorporation in the 1830s and the significant population increase due to the creation of new jobs in trades and industry, a new institution was needed to serve the resulting influx of young men. The creation of this new mercantile social group led to the opening of a second library, founded to provide a space for them to learn, gather, and access more extensive collections than those of the Providence Library Company. Members of this library included merchants,



— 4 —

clerks, physicians, and attorneys, most of whom made their money through industry, rather than through family connections and inheritances.

Though this new library was created by and for the mercantile class, they by no means restricted their acquisitions to items of business instruction. In fact, the library explicitly encouraged reading for the sake of enjoyment and for intellectual rather than financial pursuits. In the 1831 institutional ledger book, the founders rhetorically asked, “*Is it possible that gentlemen have so little taste or disposition for the elegant literature of the day, that they will not give an hour or two now or then*



TREASURES UNEARTHED & CURIOSITIES CATALOGUED

Wheaton College Students Mine the Art Collection – Guided by Wheaton Professor of Art History and Board President Elect, Tripp Evans, ten senior seminar students are in the midst of diving into our Art Collection to research, catalog, and document over one hundred objects. The provenance and history of many of our pieces have been lost as they were assembled over two centuries. Tripp’s project is an opportunity for students to gain hands-on experience conducting research in local archives, and for the library to investigate our myriad treasures. Stay tuned for discoveries!

to cull from it? – or are business, money and the love of money, so engrossing, so enchanting, to merge the thoughts of all else and leave no time for what can elevate the mind, elevate the standard of public sentiment and do something toward making the community in which we live as remarkable for its intellectual refinement, as for its industry and enterprise?” Hear, hear!


A young Bartlett was at the helm of this sentiment and the new library, and five years later, he helped to orchestrate the founding of our Providence Athenaeum from the dissolved collections of the Providence Library Company and 1831 library. Bartlett was not born into a wealthy family and did not have the advantages of a college education, but he was said to possess an omnivorous appetite for history and learning. He spent much of his young adulthood in Providence reading and studying, and participating in various societies that were devoted to the advancement of knowledge, including the Rhode Island Historical Society and the Franklin Society (which originally occupied the Reading Room of our 251 Benefit Street building). His vision for the establishment of the Athenaeum was to provide a public library with significant works in literature, as well as a public reading room for scientific and literary journals and the leading newspapers. Bartlett wrote that erecting such a public library “shall be an honor to our city and which shall render permanent benefit to our rising generation.”

Perhaps Bartlett’s most enduring gift to the organization was raising over \$15,000 with fellow member Henry Anthony towards the construction of the building the year before the financial panic of 1837. Without his passion and dedication, it is

unlikely that our iconic building designed by William Strickland would have been realized, or that we would have acquired some of the most important works in our special collections. Bartlett was invaluable in the development of the Athenaeum’s collections, and personally advocated for the acquisition of the monumental *Description de l’Egypte* and designed its Egyptian cabinet (even recording that he painted its columns himself).

Although Bartlett would later move to New York and the Southwest for sixteen years, he maintained his Athenaeum membership and was actively engaged in the affairs of the library throughout his life. As a bookseller in New York, he routinely corresponded with the Athenaeum’s Library Committee to recommend and procure books for the collection. When he returned to Providence for good in the 1850s, he immediately rejoined the board. Several years later he was elected as Secretary of State in Rhode Island, a position that he held for almost twenty years. Known by his contemporaries as a humble man, his other accomplishments included being the co-founder of the Ethnological Society in 1847 and the first librarian for John Carter Brown, helping to establish the world-renowned Americana collection. He was a champion of libraries and the advancement of knowledge, and the Athenaeum

owes much of its longevity and success to the foresight and ingenuity of the amazingly industrious Bartlett.

To learn more about Bartlett and the bequest from his heirs in 1914, check out my most recent post on *Discover*, the Special Collections blog (providenceathenaeum.org/collections/discover). 

Help us meet it!
**OUR BIGGEST
GOAL EVER**

\$240,000

The library relies on your support to offer our diverse and ever-informative programs, to bring in the best and brightest new titles, to entertain and enlighten our littlest members, and to keep our lights on! Visit our website to give online or fill out a donation form.

MORE TO LEARN

Can’t get enough of Bartlett and his participation in the design and acquisition of the Egyptian Cabinet? Join us at the Salon on Friday, April 22!

The Art Institute of Chicago’s Christopher Monkhouse will guide us through an exploration of cabinets of curiosities including our own. Volumes from the Description de l’Egypte, recently conserved courtesy of the Mary Dexter Chafee Fund, will be on display.



John Russell Bartlett



Photo: Nat Rea

LEFT

John Russell Bartlett (1805-1886). Portrait attributed to Henry Cheever Pratt, ca. 1830.

Signature courtesy of the John Russell Bartlett Society.

ABOVE

Egyptian Cabinet in the Philbrick Rare Book Room. Bartlett designed the cabinet and painted the columns in 1838.

Who is This Guy?



Matt Burriesci
Executive Director

Among the busts that encircle the library you'll find the usual suspects – Homer, Socrates, Dante – the real heavy hitters. There are, of course, notable absences, as there always will be in such an enterprise.

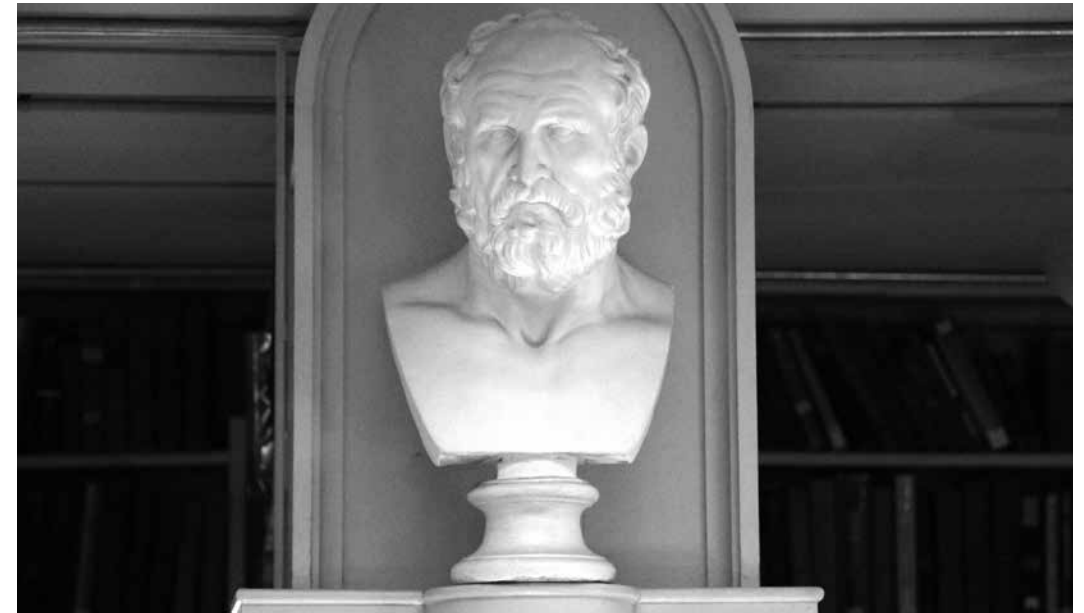
But even if you must stick exclusively to the dead white guys, one wonders where Aristotle, Plato, and Plutarch might have gone. In their place you'll find William Ellery Channing, Henry Clay, and Sir Walter Scott – all fine and important individuals, but perhaps they've shrunk a bit since the 1840s, when the Athenaeum received the bulk of its statuary.

Perhaps the most interesting bust to me is Demosthenes. Largely forgotten now, he was well known in the 19th century, and his bust occupies some prime real estate in the library, sandwiched between Shakespeare and George Washington. In the card catalog I found sixteen separate entries for Demosthenes, but today only five books remain in our possession. None have circulated in decades.

The Romans thought highly of him. In Plutarch's *Lives*, Demosthenes is compared with Cicero:

I think there can hardly be found two other orators who, from small and obscure beginnings, became so great and so mighty; who both contested with kings and tyrants; both...were driven out of their country, and returned with honor; who flying from thence again, were both seized upon by their enemies, and at last ended their lives with the liberty of their countrymen.

But Demosthenes did not have the same wealthy beginnings as Cicero. Although his father was well-off when he died, the executors of his estate squandered the inheritance, leaving Demosthenes impoverished. Demosthenes also had a speech impediment, which he remedied by speaking around pebbles stuffed in his mouth. (This technique is referenced in *My Fair Lady*, when Henry Higgins is training Eliza – as he stuffs marbles in her mouth he barks, “If they were necessary for Demosthenes, then they are necessary for Eliza Doolittle!”)



Demosthenes' first attempts at public oratory ended in abject humiliation, and he was laughed off the stage. But through the application of great will and practice, he overcame both his poverty and his natural handicap to become a great orator. In his first great speech, he convinced the Athenians to build up their navy in order to deter the Persians from invasion.

Though the Athenians were ultimately successful against the Persians, they greatly underestimated the growing threat posed by Philip of Macedonia. Demosthenes did not. He understood Philip's imperial ambitions, and he spent the rest of his life speaking out against the rising Macedonian empire.

Repeating a familiar pattern in Greek history, the city-states finally recognized the external threat, set aside their differences, and formed an alliance. It had worked against the Persians, but this time they were too late. In 338 BCE, Philip won his decisive battle at Chaeronea, and Greece was now firmly under Macedonian control. Greece would never fully recover.

Philip's successor, Alexander the Great, demanded that Athens hand over Demosthenes as an enemy of the state, but

he was ultimately convinced to let the matter go. Nevertheless, pro-Alexandrian forces in Athens sought to destroy Demosthenes' reputation. They accused him of accepting bribes. In response, Demosthenes delivered what was widely considered to be one of the finest orations of antiquity: *On The Crown*. Dispatching the charges of bribery easily and demonstrating that his accusers were nothing more than Macedonian stooges, Demosthenes then spoke on the role of good statesmen:

What are his functions? To observe things in the beginning, to foresee and foretell them to others, – this I have done: again, wherever he finds delays, backwardness, ignorance, jealousies, vices inherent and unavoidable in all communities, to contract them into the narrowest compass, and on the other hand, to promote unanimity and friendship and zeal in the discharge of duty. All this, too, I have performed; and no one can discover the least neglect on my part. Ask any man, by what means Philip achieved most of his successes, and you will be told, by his army, and by his bribing and corrupting men in power.... But by refusing the price

of corruption I have overcome Philip; for as the offerer of a bribe, if it be accepted, has vanquished the taker, so the person who refuses it and is not corrupted has vanquished the person offering. Therefore is the commonwealth undefeated as far as I am concerned.

He also condemned the political elite enabling his accusers, and commented on the ultimate stupidity of their greed:

The statesmen, who imagined they were selling everything but themselves, discovered they had sold themselves first... When the aspirant for power has gained his object, he is master also of those that sold it; and then—then I say, knowing their baseness, he loathes and mistrusts and spurns them.

Demosthenes was not only acquitted: his accuser was sent into exile. But the Alexandrian sympathizers were not finished. Several years later, Demosthenes was again accused of taking bribes, and this time, convicted. He fled the city and went into exile. Later, when Alexander died, the Athenians recalled Demosthenes, promising to forgive him. But when Antipater



(Alexander's successor) approached the city, the Athenians turned on Demosthenes, and sentenced him to death. Demosthenes chose to poison himself rather than to surrender.

At least one current presidential candidate might call Demosthenes a "loser." He failed to convince his detractors, he failed on the battlefield, and he even failed to negotiate a meaningful peace. He died a fugitive from an ungrateful city, pursued by enemy forces.

The one thing Demosthenes appears to have salvaged was his reputation. He was a revered figure to the earliest benefactors of the Athenaeum, and wisely, they placed him between Washington and Shakespeare: a self-made citizen who was one-half statesman, one-half rhetorical genius. He possessed exceptional virtue, as Plutarch notes:

Other arts, whose end it is to acquire riches or honor, are likely enough to wither in decay in poor and undistinguished towns; but virtue, like a strong and durable plant, may take root and thrive in any place where it can lay hold of an ingenuous nature, and a mind that is industrious. **Æ**

EXPAND YOUR MIND & OUR COLLECTION

Like Matt, are you curious about a subject not currently found in our collections? Fear not!

Not only is our Reference Librarian Stephanie Knott on hand to answer your most obscure questions, but the Athenaeum also happy to purchase members' requests. Request items (books, audiobooks, and DVDs included!) by visiting the General Collections page of our website or by emailing Technical Services Librarian Brendan Ryan at bryan@provath.org.

The Journey to Reading



Lindsay Shaw
Children's Librarian

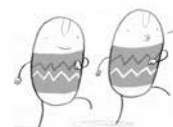
Recently my young friend (and regular visitor since toddlerhood) Elizabeth stopped by my desk sporting a missing front tooth and its wobbly mate. That was just the beginning of her big news.

It comes to pass that not only is the tooth fairy a regular visitor to Elizabeth's house, but Elizabeth is now officially a reader! I have to say, that when a child reaches the goal of reading, it is nothing short of spectacular.

This made me think about the honor bestowed on children's librarians who are able to participate in this adventure. Not that we teach them to read per se, though some do, but the bulk of our job is to maintain a collection and an environment that inspires in children an interest in reading and exploring the worlds to be found between the covers of books and in their imaginations.

In our children's library, the absence of computers is deliberate. Often we hear from parents and caregivers that this omission adds to everyone's enjoyment. By providing a space where children are not distracted by screens and have free access to tactile materials, they are allowed time to get lost in a story or express their individual creativity. This is an atmosphere that promotes an actively curious mind in a place that is expressly free of any demands other than the enjoyment of discovery.

Listening to a story set to music, singing a book out loud, learning nursery rhymes through movement, visiting with owls and




turtles, attending an opera, watching movies, nature programming, staging Shakespeare in the stacks, telling a story through dance, conquering a puzzle, playing with puppets, crayons, markers, glue sticks, glitter, and construction paper. When you look at our roster of activities, you might question how useful these activities are as prompts in learning to read. Aside from story hours, the books can appear to be just the backdrop to all this activity. The fact is, such goings-on are some of the tools used to assist in the construction of reading skills and set the stage for a compelling library experience. When children hear the language of a story or poetry or even one-on-one conversation, then follow it with a chance to use their hands and minds, it helps to spark all sorts of pre-reading skills.

Then the day comes and the reader emerges; reading skills are perfected and reading preferences become more defined. Some are voracious readers, others more selective, even reluctant at times. However, no matter what level or style of reader comes to the library, it is immensely gratifying to serve as a guide (and fellow explorer), assisting them in finding treasure in the library stacks. It's so nice to remember as the months go by, the journey that each child has made from sitting up to crawling to the magical day when they understand the



words to the songs we sing and the games we play. Then up and walking, we climb the hill with Jack and Jill, fall with Humpty Dumpty, and march with the Grand Old Duke of York, all the way to the happy day when they, like my friend Elizabeth, discover the wonder of reading.

P.S. A father just stopped by for a stack of books and informed me that when asked what job he would like to have when he grew up, his son Malcolm (another kindergarten student) told his teacher one of his selections was...a LIBRARIAN! 

The images seen here come from some of my favorite books at the moment. Be sure to check out these fantastic reads next time you're at the library!

The King and the Sea written by Heinz Janisch, illustrated by Wolf Erlbruch

I Want My Hat Back, written and illustrated by Jon Klassen

The Hueys in the New Sweater, written and illustrated by Oliver Jeffers

Hurry written by Edith Thatcher Hurd, illustrated by Clement Hurd

I'll Be You and You Be Me written by Ruth Krauss, illustrated by Maurice Sendak

The Imaginary written by A.F. Harrold, illustrated by Emily Gravett

Little Tree, written and illustrated by Loren Long

When You Were Small written by Sara O'Leary, illustrated by Julie Morstad

A COMEDY OF SUCCESSES!

The Bard is in the Building! Athenaeum is hosting a dedicated group of young Shakespearean actors (some of whom are in the third grade!) as they rehearse The Comedy of Errors with Trinity Rep instructors. This is our fourth year of hosting the program, and the final production will be presented at the library in June. So be not afraid if a small child is heard shouting "Small cheer and great welcome makes a merry feast!" amid the stacks. It's just rehearsal.

ALL THE WORLD'S A STAGE

The Athenaeum welcomes a Statewide Shakespeare Recitation Competition

Martha Douglas, Osmundson of the Lincoln School, reached out to us on behalf of the Rhode Island branch of the English-Speaking Union to host their statewide Shakespeare Recitation Competition last month. We were thrilled to provide the stage for these amazing high school students! After a fantastic array of oration demonstrations, the winner was announced to be Steven Rosario of the Trinity Academy of the Performing Arts, portraying Proteus from The Two Gentlemen of Verona. Congratulations, Steven! He will represent Rhode Island at the national competition at New York City's Lincoln Center in May. To learn more about the English-Speaking Union organization and their exceptional programming for youth, visit esuus.org.

A NEW PROFILE



We welcome Lauren VanDenBerg to the library as our new Membership & Development Associate!

Last year Lauren graduated with her MLIS and left her home in Colorado for the wilds of Rhode Island. Before joining our staff she worked as nanny in Vienna, cataloged film at a science museum, filled reference requests at a history museum, processed legislative papers at a state archive, and did a bit of everything at the National Archives. Lauren is the founder of the Providence Crafty Hour, a happy hour group with a crafting problem, and is especially fond of bright colors, bold patterns, and films with Katherine Hepburn and Cary Grant.

SIX-MONTH SNAPSHOT

Since September...

15,229

Visitors to the Athenaeum

Most popular title, fiction
All the Light We Cannot See
by Anthony Doerr

Most popular title, non-fiction
H is for Hawk by Helen Macdonald

Most popular title, children's
The Bear's Song by Benjamin Chaud

Most popular title, young adult
The 5th Wave by Rick Yancey

ROLL THE SALON & PROGRAM CREDITS!

Please make it a point to let these generous businesses, organizations, and individuals know how much their investment in the Athenaeum's 2015-16 program season means to you: Campus Fine Wines; Dr. Joseph A. Chazan; City Kitty Veterinary Care for Cats; Couture Design Associates; The Dean Hotel; Tripp Evans and Ed Cabral; the Gertrude N. Goldowsky and Seebert J. Goldowsky Foundation; the Hope Club; Allen Kurzweil and Françoise Dussart; M&S Rare Books, Inc; Martha Murphy and Mark Anderwald; The Pearle W. & Martin M. Silverstein Foundation; The Peck Building; RI Council for the Humanities; RI State Council on the Arts; Studio Hop; Variable Data Printing; Wheaton College Friends of Art; Yankee Travel.

Thanks also to our presenting partners: AS220; Brown Bookstore; Brown University Department of Portuguese and Brazilian Studies; Brown University, First Folio Committee; Cable Car Cinema; Community MusicWorks; FirstWorks; Frequency Writers; the Gamm Theatre; Goat Hill Writers; John Carter Brown Library; John Nicholas Brown Center for Public Humanities and Cultural Heritage; Providence Department of Art, Culture + Tourism; Preserve Rhode Island; RI Chamber Music Concerts; RI Council for the Humanities; RI Jewish Historical Association; RI Public Radio; RI State Council on the Arts; Trinity Repertory Company; Wheaton College Friends of Art.

And we salute our indefatigable as well as supremely able and affable Program Support Committee volunteers, brilliantly led by Board Member Grace Farmer: David Berman, Adele Bourne, Dolores Connelly, Barbara Dunney, Peggy Edwards, Melissa Eliot, Carl Farmer, Elizabeth Farjardo, Faith Fogle, Ellen Goodlin, Don Harper, Lucia Huntley, Jennifer Kiddie, Emily Klump, Lucy Ann Lepreau, Elsie Morse, Jack Nolan, Ray Olson, Lisa Popitz, Lynn Sanchez, Roger Seitz, and Cynthia Shattuck.

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RHODE ISLAND COUNCIL for the HUMANITIES

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PENMAN CREDITS

Editor – Robin Wetherill,
Communications Manager

IMAGE CREDITS

COVER: *Description de L'Egypte...* Paris: Impr. impériale, 1809-1828.

STANDING DEMOSTHENES:
Goodrich, Samuel G. *Famous Men of Ancient Times*. Boston: C.H. Peirce, 1848.

OWL ILLUSTRATION: Jameson, Mrs. (Anna). *A commonplace Book of Thoughts, Memories, and Fancies...* London: Longman, 1854.



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