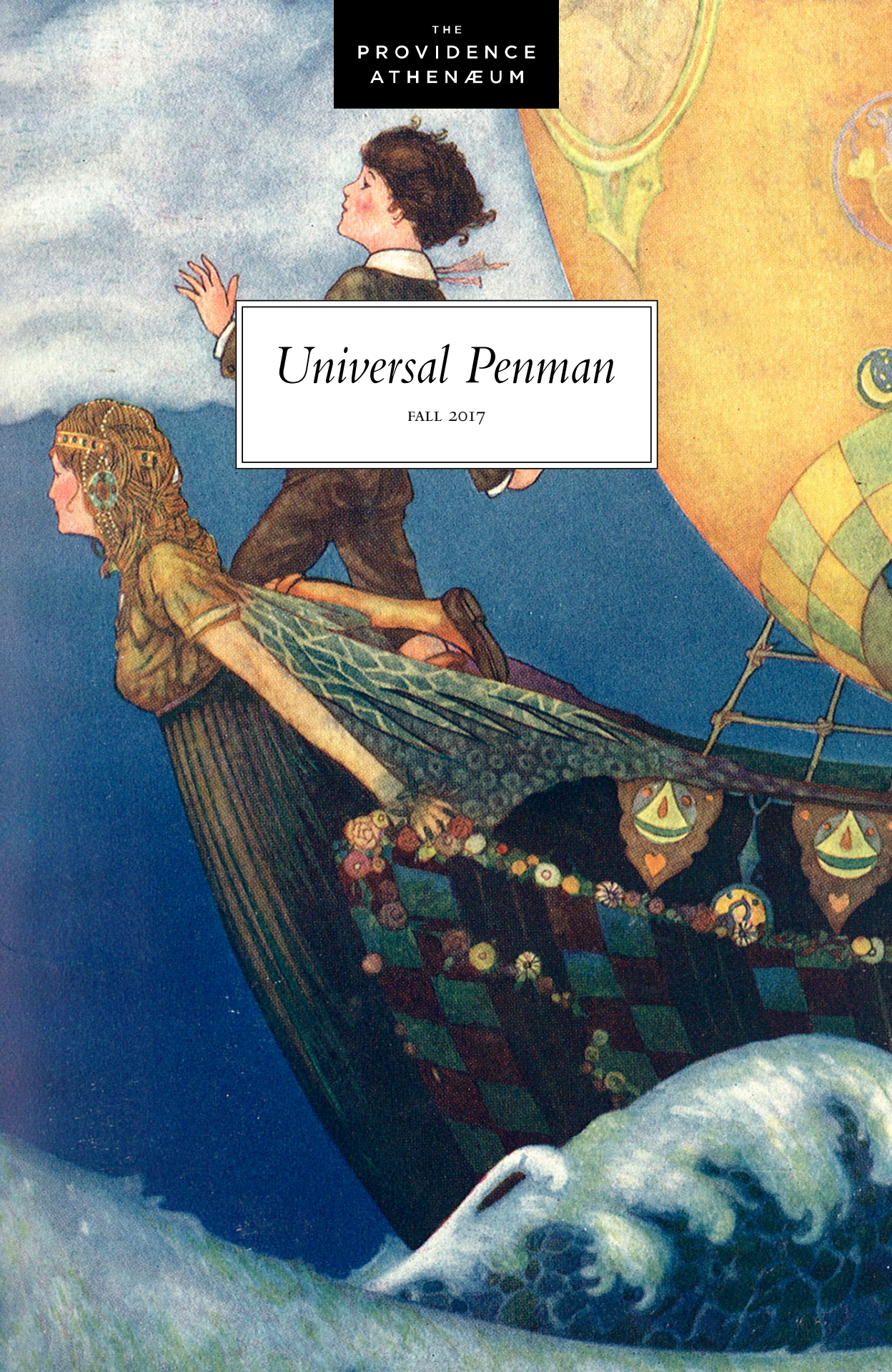


THE
PROVIDENCE
ATHENÆUM

Universal Penman

FALL 2017



Universal Penman

A Semiannual Publication of
the Providence Athenæum

FALL 2017



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A Fortunate Year



Matt Burriesci
Executive Director

Fortune has been kind to our plans here at the Athenæum. Here are just some of the highlights of the last year:

- We produced more than 100 public programs, and we featured *New York Times* bestsellers, a Pulitzer Prize winner, and even a United States Senator.
- We added several wonderful items to our special collections.
- The Athenæum added more new members than it had in the previous six years – combined.
- We broke our previous Annual Fund record by 13%.
- The library retired all of its existing debt, and we even established a modest building fund.
- We introduced several new successful programs, and thanks to a 20% increase in our earned and contributed revenue, the organization now finds itself on a sustainable path.

The good news has continued into the current fiscal year. In August, the Athenæum received a \$50,000 Sustaining Cultural Heritage Collections grant from the National

Endowment for the Humanities. Only 23% of applicants received a grant of this kind last year, and we are the only institution in New England to receive one this year. This funding will enable us to do so much for our collections and the building, and it will inform our preservation strategy for years to come.

The staff and board have worked so hard, and obviously none of this would've been possible without the support of you – our members, donors, and partners. We've also done a lot of planning here, and as I was preparing for the coming year, I returned to our strategic and tactical plans. All Executive Directors come factory-loaded with plans. I have so many plans that I need a database to keep track of them.

As I was doing all this, I was also reading *The Consolation of Philosophy* by Boethius, and I came upon this:

If you commit a sail to the winds,
not where your will aims will you advance
but where the breezes will drive.

Boethius was a guy with a lot of plans, too. One of them got him in trouble, and he was doing a stretch in the stony lonesome when he wrote this. It didn't end well for him, but *The Consolation of Philosophy* did turn out to be a hugely influential book for more than a thousand years. Boethius remains wiser than I am, in the way the sun is larger than a termite. So I took a break from the plans and considered the breezes.

We've certainly enjoyed some favorable winds here recently. For example, on the *same day* we found out about the NEH grant, we discovered that the original drainpipe beneath the Richmond Fountain was fully operational, which means it's much more likely we can get the water flowing again. The pipe is 150 years old, and it hasn't been used in at least a decade. This is a *remarkable* piece of good luck – it was far more likely that the pipe was failing, which would've meant an indefinite delay.

But winds can change. About a week later, the climate control system in the Philbrick Rare Book Room failed. Obviously, this is a problem for our special collections. Whatever I had planned those days got tossed out the window. Suddenly I was constantly in meetings or on hold, desperately trying to get a giant metal coil manufactured in Omaha.


Luck. The Romans worshiped it in the form of the blind and capricious goddess Fortuna, who was responsible for both good and bad fates. One angered Fortuna by lacking *virtus*, which doesn't quite translate into modern English – it's not *quite* “virtue” in the modern sense. It sort of means “strength” or maybe “strength

of character,” but the word has martial connotations that would be unfamiliar in modernity.

That didn't mean one could *control* Fortuna. Actually, until very recently in the human experience, nobody seriously believed that human beings could control anything. In the Renaissance, Machiavelli compared Fortuna to a river which sustains our lives, but which also floods our crops and destroys the village. The best a prudent man could do was to erect levies and dams

to prepare, and to court Fortune's favor by pursuing *virtù*. In the world before this one, it was the height of human arrogance to presume one could control the future, or that we were entirely responsible for good fortune. If you convinced yourself of such a thing, you weren't just foolish: you were courting disaster.

I'm so grateful things are going well at the Athenæum, where well-planned levies and dams are being built by a lot of dedicated people. We are also living in a time when people are returning to the humanities, and the library is benefiting from that. These disciplines have been so neglected in our society, and for so long, that the pendulum is starting to swing in the other direction. Literature, art, history, philosophy – these are essential to our *lives*. And given everything that's happening in the republic right now, we're starting to remember their value to our governance, too.

So I thank you, and I thank Fortuna, and I promise we'll work very hard for this marvelous institution. It's a great time to be part of the Athenæum, and I feel very lucky to be here. 



A Home Library



Lindsay Shaw
Children's Librarian

Libraries hold many memories. The feel of the book, the smell, images on soft pages with slight tears and fingerprints, or the latent evidence of cookie crumbs all conjure up a world that we left behind but have not forgotten.

The rediscovery of a book not seen since childhood is a powerful experience. And libraries, especially ones as old as ours, offer literally thousands of these moments.

I often feel that our shelves are lined with memories as well as stories. The staff constantly finds mementos tucked between pages in the form of receipts, notes, and old bookmarks (including one recently found gem from 1984 that pleads Athenæum members to take *their own* books to the beach!). During the never-ending task of reshelving, it feels that each title returned is coming home, with a new adventure under its covers and, in the case of children's books, often a scar to prove it.

In 1940, the Athenæum distributed a letter written by Amey Aldrich, a member living in Rome "as it expresses so happily the place that a library – a home library like the Athenæum – may have in the life of a family." The description of the Athenæum as

a "home library" is so charming – I love the idea that this library is a home, both for the books, but more importantly for the people who read them. Though many more of us can afford to build up our personal libraries than those who were able to when the library was founded in 1836, only a few have the ability to curate a collection that comes close to the variety a library can offer. The Athenæum was always intended to be an extension of the collections we have in our living rooms or on our nightstands. It has always offered inviting nooks and comfortable chairs and countless recommendations from staff and fellow members.

As Children's Librarian, I have watched so many grow up in the library and have been lucky to meet many members who count the Athenæum as a home away from home. In Amey's letter, she writes, "Next to my parents I think the Athenæum was one of the strongest influences of my childhood



Winnie-the-Pooh, by A.A. Milne. Illustrations by Ernest H. Shepard. [c1926], first American edition. Old Juveniles Collection.

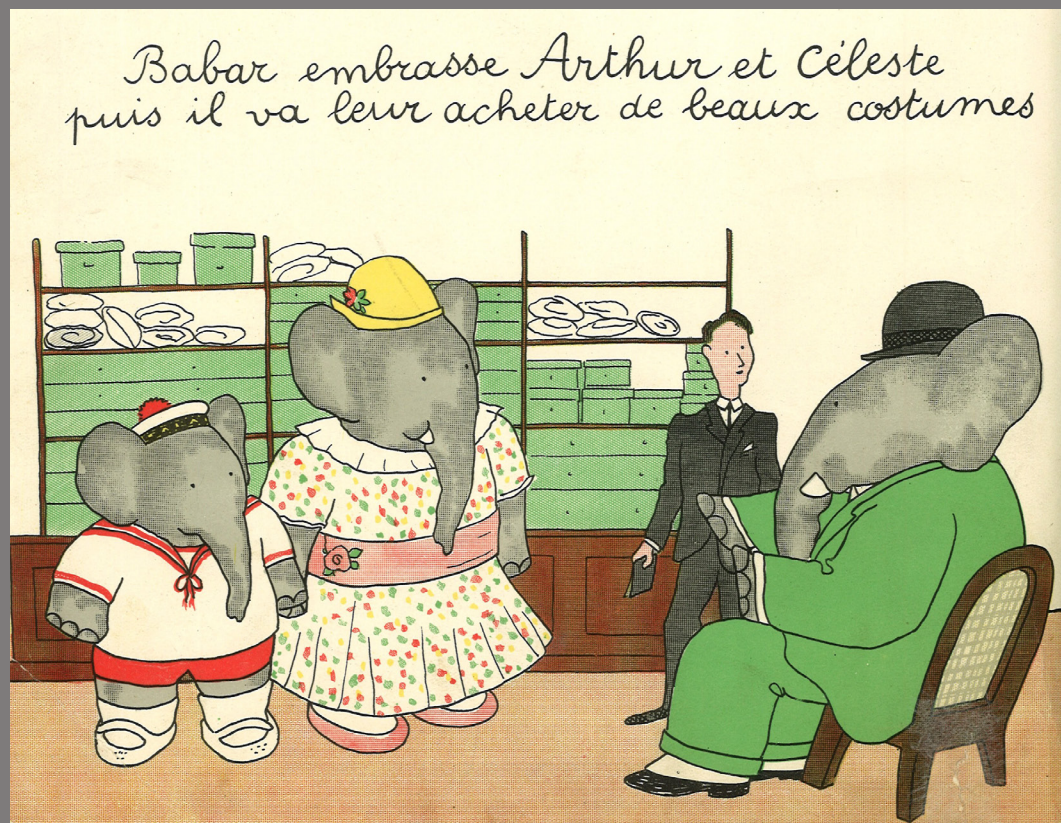
and youth, and certainly one of the most important influences on my education...I recall it as a perfect library, in its wide range, the delightful accessibility of the books, the atmosphere so quiet yet with such whispered friendliness and kindness." She wrote her letter to the library after receiving an Athenæum brochure all the way in Italy: "You see your brochure brought a wave of reminiscence, gratitude and not a little homesickness over me. I felt I must thank you for it and try to express a little of the much I owe to the Athenæum."

Amey was born in 1873, the year the Richmond Fountain was installed along the fence on Benefit Street. She grew up reading at the Athenæum by gaslight and before the Isham addition was added to make a specific space for children. Even in the nineteenth century, when the concept of children's libraries had yet to be developed, children considered this place a home. It's easy to imagine Amey and her brothers clambering up the front steps, hiding in the stacks, or eagerly reading our facsimile of *Alice's Adventures Under Ground* (later called *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*), a brand-new acquisition in 1886. Amey even recounts that her brother Richard "was once, in his devotion to [the Athenæum], locked in at night"

(a dream of many of the visitors I meet and an escapade that immediately brings to mind the favorite *Mixed-Up Files of Mrs. Basil E. Frankweiler* by E.L. Koningsburg.)

It's almost surreal to read Amey's letter and then explore the books that would have been available to her and her family. She could have thumbed through Nathaniel Hawthorne's *Tanglewood Tales for Girls and Boys* or a first edition of Louisa May Alcott's *Little Women*, both of which are still housed in our Old Juveniles Collection. We know that Amey returned to Providence from Rome in the 1940s, and I find it impossible to believe that she didn't immediately visit the Athenæum, her "perfect library." Since she left Providence over 30 years before, the library had undergone some changes; one which would have been of particular interest to her was the 1914 Isham addition which was devoted, in part, to housing children's literature and story hours.

I can imagine her walking up the familiar granite steps and through the front doors, and then exploring the new wing which housed so many of the books that shaped her childhood. Perhaps she searched the shelves for a favorite title, still on display for a new generation of children to treasure and take home with them.



LEFT

Histoire de Babar, le petit éléphant by Jean de Brunhoff, 1931. Early edition. Raven Room Collection.

Goodnight Moon by Margaret Wise Brown, 1947. Illustrated by Clement Hurd. Circulating collection.

ABOVE

"The Dish Ran Away with the Spoon" from *Hey Diddle Diddle in Aunt Louisa's Home Companion* by Laura Valentine, late 19th century. Old Juveniles Collection.

I remember the first book I borrowed for my then infant daughter from the Athenæum. Our family had an apartment on Prospect Street, the perfect location for a stroll down the hill to the library. Coincidentally, the building that housed our apartment was owned by the late Kay Thurber, an enthusiastic member who spearheaded the Children's Committee in the 1960s, reinvigorated our programming for children, including the legendary Halloween soirées, and helped increase the circulation of children's books by a whopping 25%.

On that visit I borrowed just one book, *Goodnight Moon* by Margaret Wise Brown. The classic story with its beautiful pictures was the perfect choice to entertain us that afternoon. To this day, *Goodnight Moon* brings back warm memories of a special time and the kindness of the ladies at the front desk as they checked it out to me.



Decades later, I get to be one of those lucky ladies at the desk to help patrons recall their own childhood favorites and to discover new classics to share with their families. I send out everything from *Goodnight Moon* to *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* to *Don't Let the Pigeon Drive the Bus*, knowing that they'll be a part of your home for a while before they find their way back to our shelves.

The Athenæum has been a constant in the lives of so many generations, even as its building and collections have grown and developed. That sense of nostalgia, familiarity, and comfort that so defines "a home" is present here every day. Even visitors who walk in for the first time can feel it, the warmth of being surrounded by stories and old friends in the shape of books. Home is certainly where the heart is, and to me, that means where the books are. **Æ**

IMAGINARY WORLDS: STORYTELLING IN PICTURES & WORDS

An imaginative exhibition will be on view October 13 through January 5, with an opening reception on Friday, October 13, 3:30-5:30pm.

The exhibition will showcase the creative minds and great talent of generations of artists and authors who give children windows to worlds they could only imagine. The selections include rare and early editions from the Old Juveniles Collection such as Alice's Adventures in Wonderland, Gulliver's Travels, Little Women, and Winnie-the-Pooh, as well as some of our favorite Caldecott and Newbery Award winning titles.

We encourage you to visit us and to engage in a family-friendly journey through the timeless, magical worlds of Children's Literature. The opening reception on October 13 will be followed by a special Family Night in the Reading Room at 6pm.

That Intangible Something



Robin Wetherill
Director of Marketing & Communications

It often feels as if the Athenæum has remained almost untouched by the last two centuries.

While traces of modernity are apparent in the electric lights and the tourists snapping photos with their cellphones, it's not hard to envision those same lights fed by gas and those tourists as having arrived by buggy.

I recently stumbled across an old *Athenæum Bulletin* from 1939 which included the following reflection written by Joseph LeRoy Harrison, a librarian here from 1894 to 1911. His experience here so closely resembles my own that I couldn't help but share it. I am constantly struck by the connections across time that are a staple of this place. Separated by a century, Mr. Harrison and I both agree that this weird little library has a very particular spirit, and I think I can safely say we both have felt tremendously lucky to have the keys.



On a hazy fall day, the last day of September, 1894, I turned into the Athenæum entrance on my way from Sunday service at the Central Congregational Church, mounted the long flight of stone steps and for the first time opened the great green doors with my own key. The contrast from the stern, granite exterior, with its tall Grecian columns, to one of the most charming library rooms in the United States was startling. The warm sun shone through the ceiling of skylights, the alcoves opened invitingly and the busts of great men, whose names I never could feel sure of, looked down from their heights at the top of the paneled shelf ends. The tradition, the atmosphere and that intangible something which may be called the spirit of the old institution pervaded everything. You felt that generation after generation had pored over the books about you and that the grandmothers

I find it quite impossible to speak of the Athenæum in an impersonal way.

of the girls of today had gazed through the same alcove windows as the boys came down the hill from the college above.

On a wintry December day, 1911, seventeen years after this memorable Sunday, I passed down those same steps on my way to a new job, leaving behind the library I had come to love, work into which I had put heart and soul, friendships that will always live and years of a wonderful, happy life.

[RW: Here follows a summary of the initiatives and projects overseen by Harrison that so shaped the library we know today. He touches on the "outstanding citizens of Providence" who served as board and staff members. He discusses conforming the Athenæum "more nearly to changed library thought and methods" with the introduction of the Dewey Decimal System. He mentions improvements in the grounds and the conversion of the rooms flanking the front entrance into reference rooms, now the Executive Director's office and staff room. He notes the renovation of a mezzanine gallery into the Art Room, the addition of the back door by the Circulation Desk, and the introduction of electricity. Harrison also applauds the remodeling of the Reading Room, noting "No one who remembers this rather forbidding room will fail to realize with what enthusiasm the transformation was welcomed."

He ends by looking forward to the 1914 addition which was to become our first children's area.]

Harrison continues... In [an annual] report is an account of the celebration of the seventy-fifth anniversary of the incorporation of the Athenæum. The venerable Mr. Arnold presided and Dr. William H.P. Faunce gave the address of the occasion. In closing this brief sketch of the library as I knew it, whose writing has taken me so delightfully back, I want to quote his charming tribute to the Athenæum:

"I find it quite impossible to speak of the Athenæum in an impersonal way, and so I hope you will forgive me if I fail to do it. The Athenæum is vastly more than a public institution. To those of us who know it, and have known it for a generation, it is an influence intellectual, spiritual, almost personal... Through the kindness of a class-mate, I was introduced to this building, so stern without, so warm and friendly within. I can truly say that this is the only library in all the world that I ever loved. The long golden afternoons that I spent in these alcoves are among the happiest recollections of my life. The repose, the seclusion, the still and quiet air of delightful studies, the fading light as the sun was sinking down over the city, the hushed footsteps, the touch of vanished hands in every alcove- all this provided an impression well-neigh religious..."

While I have loved many libraries, the Athenæum will always hold a unique place in my life. There is something special at work here - as if those busts, creaky floorboards, and the "still and quiet air" that have witnessed centuries welcome me personally each day. Though we no longer open the doors with Mr. Harrison's weighty key, there is no feeling like being the first one here at the start of the day and saying good morning to the same library he loved. **Æ**

ATHENA SOCIETY LUNCHEON

Have you included the Athenæum in your will or estate plans? If so, we would love to invite you to our first annual Athena Society luncheon later this fall to celebrate you and the commitment you have made. Join us at Blithewold (which will beautifully decorated for the holidays) for an intimate luncheon acknowledging your dedication.

Please contact Danielle Kemsley at 401-421-6970 x15 or dkemsley@provath.org so we can formally welcome you as a founding member of the Athena Society and send you an invitation to the luncheon. Danielle would also be happy to answer any questions you may have and to discuss information about planned giving options and the benefits of being an Athena Society member.

CH-CH-CH-CHANGES

We have some both exciting and bitter-sweet staff developments.

We are sad to announce that the ever-capable and universally beloved **Amy VanderWeele** (Membership & Development Associate/Circulation) has taken a job as Fiction & Readers' Advisory Coordinator at North Kingstown Free Library. Best of luck, Amy! Don't be a stranger.

In happier news, we welcome **Erin Perfect** to the Circulation team! Erin has had a myriad of odd jobs including working as a chocolate maker and a bicycle tour guide. She loves cheese (perhaps above all else).

And we've had some title changes. **Ken Garrepy** has now ascended to the throne of Director of Finance & Administration while **Robin Wetherill** was crowned with the scepter of Director of Marketing & Communications.

SIX-MONTH SNAPSHOT

Since March...

20,609

Visitors to the Athenæum

Most popular title, fiction
A Gentleman in Moscow
by Amor Towles

Most popular title, non-fiction
Dead Feminists: Historic Heroines in Living Color by Chandler O'Leary
& Jessica Spring

Most popular title, children's
Vehicles by Xavier Deneux

Most popular DVD
Captain Fantastic

ROLL THE CREDITS!

We are so thankful for the generous businesses, organizations, and individuals who make our undertakings possible. Please make it a point to let these fine friends know how much their investment in the Athenæum's 2017-18 program season and activities means to you: 1772 Foundation; Archive, Document, Display, and Disseminate Fund at the Rhode Island Foundation; Campus Fine Wines; Carter Fund at the Rhode Island Foundation; Champlin Foundation; Chas A. Miller III & Birch Coffey; Granny Squibb's Iced Tea; Ida Ballou Littlefield Memorial Trust; Ira S. & Anna Galkin Charitable Trust; June Rockwell Levy Foundation; Mabel T. Woolley Trust; Narragansett Beer; National Endowment for the Humanities; Nat Rea Photography; Partridge Snow & Hahn, LLP; Pop Uprise; Rhode Island Historical Preservation & Heritage Commission; Rhode Island State Council on the Arts; Richard & Barbara Bell Fund for Social Justice; Sharpe Family Foundation; Starkweather & Shepley; Stephen Coon; White Family Foundation; Variable Data Printing; and Yankee Travel. We especially thank our Fall 2017 season sponsor *Bank of America*.

A deep bow of appreciation must also go to this season's presenting partners: Brown University Bookstore; Providence Children's Film Festival; Quizmaster Alex Moffett; Guest Quizmaster C. Morgan Grefe; Rhode Island Historical Society; Rhode Island Public Radio; and the University of Rhode Island's Metcalf Institute for Marine & Environmental Reporting.

And a tip of our most festive hats to our amiable, affable, and always accommodating Program Support Committee without whom Athenæum activities would be the driest of affairs: Jennifer Kiddie (at the helm— long may she reign!), Murat Aydogdu, Jennifer Becker, David Berman, Adele Bourne, Dolores Connelly, Erin Dahill, Barbara Dunney, Peggy Edwards, Melissa Eliot, Elizabeth Fajardo, Grace Farmer, Carl Farmer, Faith Fogle, Sarah Gleason, Ellen Goodlin, Greg Healy, Haley Hinsberger, Liz Hubbard, Lucia Huntley, Jennifer Huntley-Corbin, Jane Lancaster, Lucy Ann Lepreau, Katelyn Menard, Elsie Morse, Kyle Rossilli, Lynn Sanchez, Cynthia Shattuck, Philip Siblo-Landsman, and Claire Uziel.

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PENMAN CREDITS

Editor – Robin Wetherill,
Director of Marketing &
Communications

IMAGE CREDITS

COVER: Endpapers from
Kenneth Grahame's *The
Cambridge Book of Poetry
for Children*, 1916. Illustrated
by Maud Fuller.

FLORAL FLOURISH:
Boethius. *Of the Consolation
of Philosophy*, 1712.

ALICE: Lewis Carroll's *Alice's
Adventures Under Ground*.
Illustrated by Lewis Carroll,
1886. This is a facsimile of the
original manuscript later de-
veloped into *Alice's Adventures
in Wonderland*.

KEY: Key to the front door of
the library, Athenæum archives.



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