



THE  
PROVIDENCE  
ATHENÆUM

## PRESS RELEASE

Contact: Robin Wetherill, Director of Marketing & Communications  
401-421-6970 x27 | [rwetherill@provath.org](mailto:rwetherill@provath.org)  
**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**  
3.26.18

### THE PROVIDENCE ATHENÆUM RECEIVES \$100,000 GIFT TO BENEFIT SPECIAL COLLECTIONS



**PROVIDENCE, RI-** The Providence Athenæum has announced that the library has received a transformative \$100,000 gift from a loyal anonymous couple to support special collections development. The newly established fund will allow the Athenæum to acquire and conserve important works. "We are very grateful to be part of this extraordinary Athenæum community and its history," the donors commented. "We're very glad to give back what we can."

"This gift will have tremendous impact," says Kate Wodehouse, Director of Collections & Library Services. "The Athenæum rarely has the opportunity to add significant works to the collection through purchase, and such a contribution allows us not only to conserve valuable items the library already owns, but also to enhance the depth of our book and art collections. We are deeply grateful for this generosity, and are excited about the treasures it will allow us to bring to Providence."

"Special Collections is truly the beating heart of the Athenæum," remarked R. Tripp Evans, Board President. "When William Strickland designed the building in the 1830s, his inspiration was in part the Athenian Treasury at

Delphi – a building, like ours, created to safeguard precious objects. Whereas the Delphi building acted like a safety deposit box, our treasury has always been intended to serve this community. The impact of this gift will be felt both immediately and for generations to come – preserving a collection that dates back to the fifteenth century, allowing for the thoughtful expansion of our holdings, and inspiring the scholars and artists who use these works. Such stewardship of this invaluable resource, one that creates community not only with one another but also with the past, is truly remarkable.”

The first major acquisition enabled by the new fund is three illustrated plates from the *Description de l'Égypte* (one pictured above). Published from 1809–1828, this monumental 25-volume set depicts the discoveries of Napoleon’s expedition to Egypt. The impact of this book was enormous, and it paved the way for the birth of modern Egyptology. The Athenæum owns a first-edition set which was purchased with the assistance of Providence’s wealthiest citizens in 1838, two years after the founding of the institution. Decades ago, librarians discovered that the *Description’s* fourteen color plates of bird species had been sliced out of the binding and stolen, likely in the early twentieth century. The newly purchased pages are plates 3, 5, and 6, and depict fifteen birds in total, including a striking pharaoh eagle-owl. The library hopes to one day replace all of the missing plates.

The public is encouraged to view the *Description* plates as part of the *Observing Nature: Edna Lawrence & Cabinets of Curiosities* exhibition in the Philbrick Rare Book Room, April 6 – June 17. Open gallery hours: Tuesdays & Thursdays, 12–6pm; weekends and other times by request.

###

About the Providence Athenæum: *The Providence Athenæum is an independent, member-supported library and cultural center located on Providence’s historic Benefit Street. Over its nearly 200 years of existence, the library has welcomed illustrious writers, spirited thinkers, and energetic community members through its doors to engage in reading, conversation, and debate. At its heart, the Athenæum encourages a love of reading and learning to all. Learn more at [provath.org](http://provath.org).*