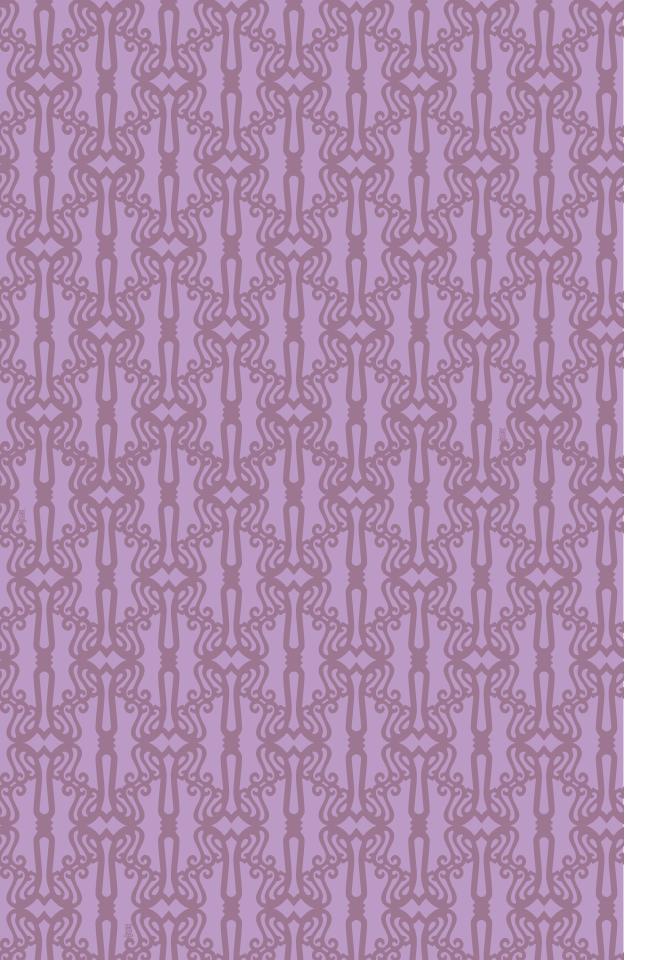
### THE PROVIDENCE ATHENÆUM



SPRING 2018



## Universal Penman

A Semiannual Publication of the Providence Athenæum

SPRING 2018

#### TABLE OF CONTENTS

 MATT BURRIESCI

 Intellectual Thirst

 2

JANE LANCASTER
Well-Behaved Women? ......4

Miscellany ..... II

## Intellectual Thirst



Matt Burriesci Executive Director

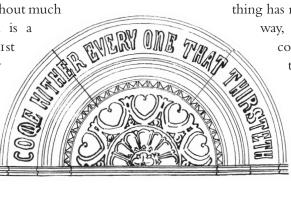
# When I first came to the Athenæum I wanted to get the fountain running again.

I understood that it was not the most critical issue facing the institution, which is why it has languished for more than a decade. I don't fault past caretakers. I know that what is urgent at the Athenæum is often what demands the attention. There's only so much time and money. The roof can't leak. The boiler has to work. Important books need to be conserved. I get it.

It could be considered a frivolous thing – a luxury without much

utility. What good is a fountain in the 21st century? Originally installed as a public drinking fountain, it was given to the Athenæum in 1873 by Anna R i c h m o n d.

Today it's just a beautiful thing that makes a pleasant sound. That's all it is. A thing of beauty. A delight.



There's certainly no profit in it. It was only thanks to the generous contributions of Dick Gilbane and Candy Adriance that we were able to get it going again. In the last two years, it has consumed a significant amount of time. It required energy and effort from the staff, from our friends at Malone Plumbing, from the city, and from skilled tradesmen. Whatever money has been raised has been spent, and more than spent. This thing has not profited us in any

way, and if anything, it'll cost even more money to keep it going. So what's the point? In our metric-crazy age, obsessed only with the cost of things, and never their value, how do we explain this

fountain? How can we defend the money spent, the time required, just so some water could come out of a spigot?

But society raises this same question about everything the Athenæum values, particularly the humanities, and all the gifts they bestow on us: most notably the improvement of the spirit that sets us forward on the pursuit of wisdom. Socrates believed that pursuit was doomed to fail, and yet it was worth doing anyway.

Early members of the Athenæum believed in the power of immaterial things. They didn't just seek knowledge – they sought the ability to use knowledge correctly, which is the best definition I know of for wisdom. Many were wealthy and engaged in commerce, but they sought to use their wealth to better all of our lives. Certainly Anna Richmond used her wealth that way. And just as her public drinking fountain was a both a piece of art and a necessary tool against the spread of disease, the treasures inside the building were both beautiful objects and absolutely essential to the education and values of the community.

At the opening of the building in 1838, 35 years before the fountain was installed, Brown University President Francis Wayland charged the library with this mission:

We must render knowledge, valuable knowledge, accessible to the whole community. We must collect the treasures of science and literature, and throw them open to all who are disposed to avail themselves of their benefits ... We must, therefore, lay the foundations of this institution in such principles, that it will grow with the growth of intelligence, widening and deepening the channels of its influence, as it passes on from age to age, more and more thoroughly imbuing every successive race with admiration of all that is great, with love for all that is beautiful, and with reverence for all that is holy.

He argued that the citizenry must be cultivated by literature, science, history, and philosophy, or else the loss is felt by all of mankind. He described the new library as "a fountain of living water, at which the

### LIVING WATER

For the first time in over a decade, the Athenæum's fountain will run again! Help us celebrate this milestone and continue to slake the intellectual thirst of our community with a gift in its honor (by mail or at provath.org).

Donors will be specially recognized in this year's Annual Report.

intellectual thirst of this whole community may be slaked."

It feels like we've sometimes neglected those principles, the same way we've neglected this physical fountain. The reason the fountain is just as important as so much else here – the leaking roofs, the strange electrical wiring, and the delicate collection – is because the Athenæum has to care about this stuff. Not in a rhetorical way, not in our marketing, but deeply, in every aspect of what we do. We have to believe in that fountain of living water. We can't turn away from that which gives our lives meaning. We can't lock the past away, neglect it, or treat history like an ornament, rather than our wisest advisor.

Some things are universal. Some values aren't East or West, but simply human. Beauty and delight belong to that category of the human experience, and so neither can be worthless. What the heck are we doing all this for, if we can't have a little beauty and delight?

It may sometimes feel as if we are living in an ugly and utilitarian age, in which there is no use for anything that cannot be measured. But in our city, in Divine Providence, the water flows, and it belongs to everyone.

## Well-Behaved Women?





Godey's Lady's Book and Ladies' American Magazine. Volume XXII, February 1841. Athenæum collection.

Jane Lancaster Historian

Athena, goddess of war, accomplished weaver, personification of wisdom and the arts, was a complicated goddess. She played tricks and did not always behave impeccably.

She is an entirely appropriate symbol of a library, where books can inspire and liberate. Her bust, over the Athenæum's Circulation Desk, sits on a pedestal on which hangs historian Laurel Thatcher Ulrich's celebrated words, "Well-behaved women rarely make history." Rarely is not of course the same as never, and like Athena, the women of the Athenæum, though usually (but not always) well-behaved, have made contributions, large and small, to the Providence Athenæum and its predecessor libraries since 1753. On the way, they contributed to social change and expanded possibilities for other women.

Widow **Sarah Burrough** was the only woman among the original 86 shareholders of the Providence Library Company in 1753; married women in the eighteenth century had little financial independence. Things were unchanged in 1836, when only two women, **Candace Allen** and **Mrs. Samuel Arnold** were donors to the building fund for the library's new home on Benefit Street (though Miss Allen's contribution of \$380 was the eleventh largest gift to the project).

But women were always readers on their husbands' or fathers' shares, and by the beginning of the nineteenth century there was a smattering of women members. One of them, **Miss Mary Howell**, who was in her early twenties in 1802, listed the 42 volumes she'd read in the previous six months, most of which she must have borrowed from the library. They included *The Life of Mary Wollstonecraft Godwin*, a biography of the early feminist, as well as the archetypal Gothic novel *The Mysteries of Udolpho* and, in a more serious vein, *From Descartes to Kant*.

Mary Howell may have been ahead of the times, but by the 1830s, when the current Athenæum was founded, Providence women were in something of an intellectual ferment. When Englishman James Buckingham visited the new library in 1840, he went so far as to remark, "It may be mentioned as another good feature of this institution, that ladies are admitted as shareholders, subscribers and visitors, as well as gentlemen; and that, besides having the accommodation of books at their own homes, for the library is a circulating one, they frequently honour the reading room with their presence."

In 1855 Nathaniel Hawthorne rather rudely called such ladies "scribbling women," but several notable female authors lived and wrote in Providence. The one with the closest link to the Athenæum is of course poet and essayist Sarah Helen Whitman, but strangely enough she was never a member - in true frugal Yankee fashion she used friends' tickets to take out books. Whitman is remembered in Providence for her brief, doomed romance with poet Edgar Allan Poe, but her contemporaries included the famous transcendentalist author Margaret Fuller, who taught in Providence in the 1830s, abolitionist Frances Whipple, who wrote the Memoirs of Elleanor Eldridge, about the tribulations of a free black Rhode Islander (the Athenæum has a copy), and salonnière Anne Lynch, who wrote a poem celebrating libraries:

Speak low, tread softly through these halls; Here genius lives enshrined, Here reign, in silent majesty, The monarchs of the mind. A mighty spirit-host they come From every age and clime; Above the buried wrecks of years They breast the tide of Time. And in their presence-chamber here They hold their regal state, And round them throng a noble train, The gifted and the great.

She held a salon – in her house, not in the library – and in 1843 "the best literary society of Providence could be found in the parlor of Miss Lynch." A generation later, feminist author **Charlotte Perkins Gilman**, who was too poor at that time to afford a share, nevertheless used the library, and was in and out several times a week, meeting friends, reading, and even eating her lunch on her way to the gym.

So women were members, readers (even though mid-century librarians deplored the prevalence of novel reading), and writers; by the later nineteenth century they became major donors and employees. Women as fundraisers started in mid-century with 18-year-old **Elizabeth "Lizzie" Patten** who carried Malbone's ivory miniature *The Hours* (see page 7) from door to



COLEMAN & CO.,

Hoppin Homestead Euilding,



LEFT (TOP) An 1884 *tableau vivant* with three granddaughters of Anna Eddy Richmond, the donor of the Athenæum's fountain: Amy Dorrance Richmond Taylor as Past, Mary Hepburn Parsons as Present, and Anna Richmond as Future.

– LEFT (BOTTOM) An improptu 2018 *tableau vivant* polaroid at our recent Greek Revival night with staff members Robin Wetherill, Kate Wodehouse, and Stephanie Ovoian.

ABOVE The Hours ivory miniature by Edward Greene Malbone, 1801. Acquired by the library in 1854, due to the efforts of Lizzie Patten, the teenage daughter of the Athenæum's Vice President.

# They frequently honour the reading room with their presence.

door to successfully raise the \$1,200 asking price (despite her parents' skepticism). That is equivalent to at least \$38,000 now.

More conventional funders included Anna Eddy Richmond, who donated the granite drinking fountain on Benefit Street in 1873; she gave \$300 and a further \$300 for its upkeep. Wives of industrialists were major donors around the turn of the century; Elizabeth Goddard Shepard financed the Art Room and electrification of the building in the 1890s, and Mrs. Alfred Coats raised the money to renovate the Reading Room a decade later.

Mary Angell was the Athenæum's first female employee. Hired in 1872 on a month's trial, she stayed for 23 years. She started compiling the card catalogue in 1883, and Grace Leonard, a trained librarian who was hired in 1895, continued the work; she eventually became the first female head librarian and stayed for the next 30 years. There have been 11 librarians/executive directors since Miss Leonard started in 1911, six of them women, who between them put in 86 years at the library. One of them, the inimitable Sylvia Moubayed, served from 1970-81. Dubbed by the Providence Journal the "zingiest librarian," Moubayed tripled the endowment, renovated the building, built the Platner addition, revitalized the children's library, inaugurated parties and special events (some grumbled that the Ath had become the East Side Sports and Social Club, while the children particularly enjoyed a spooky Halloween party), and secured nonprofit status for the library. Two final recent women of note were Executive Director Allison Maxell and Salon instigator Christina Bevilacqua; under their leadership the Ath changed its focus and became the lively cultural center it is today.

None of these women behaved badly, though some of them were far from willing to sit meekly by. They worked within the system to educate themselves, to improve the library, the city, and their fellow citizens, female and male, and even if they were often well-behaved, they certainly did make history.

## OBSERVING NATURE: EDNA LAWRENCE & CABINETS OF CURIOSITIES

### Exhibition on view April 6 - June 17 in the Philbrick Rare Book Room

We're recognizing another groundbreaking Providence woman: Edna Lawrence, RISD alumna and founder of the Nature Lab. Selections from the Athenæum's Natural History Collection will be on display alongside specimens of insects, birds, and other wonders collected by the Nature Lab, as well as drawings by Edna and her students.

Gallery hours: Tuesdays & Thursdays, 12-6pm. Other times by request.

Come Hither



Kate Wodehouse Director of Collections & Library Services

A nineteenth-century legend claimed that if you were to drink from the fountain that beckoned in front of the Athenæum, you were destined to return to Providence.

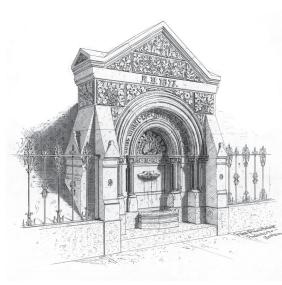
While we can't attest to the accuracy of that claim, we do know that the fountain's donor certainly did have more in mind than just a decorative sculpture.

In 1872, the Athenæum's Board of Directors received a letter asking if the institution would "favorably entertain" the donation of a public drinking fountain to be erected at the foot of the property on Benefit Street. It was only after the architectural plans had been approved by the city and the granite fountain constructed into the embankment that the institution learned the name of its benefactor, Anna Eddy Richmond (1810-1881).

Anna, daughter of U.S. Representative Samuel Eddy and wife of a successful Providence fabric manufacturer, was known for her generous spirit and dedication to Unitarian values of providing for others. After her husband's death in 1866, she was entrusted with the financial responsibilities for the family, which was unusual for the time. She gave to many organizations both near and far, but often chose to give anonymously. Although the Athenæum's fountain quickly became known as "The Richmond Fountain" once the donor was revealed, Anna chose not to emblazon it with her own name as was customary. Instead, she had an inscription carved into the stone: "Come Hither Every One That Thirsteth."

To acknowledge her support, the Board expressed "their grateful appreciation of the generous liberality which has prompted her to bestow upon the Athenæum this costly and gratifying benefaction, not only for the adornment of these grounds, but also for the refreshment and comfort of the community." It is not surprising that Anna's gift took the shape of a fountain given her connection to social causes. As the Board pointed out, such a contribution was not just beautiful, but a "comfort" for the community at large; public access to fresh water was of increasing concern to the entire country. The proliferation of drinking fountains after 1880 was largely due to the need to provide clean water to cities to prevent the spread of diseases like cholera, and was promoted by temperance societies as an alternative to drinking alcohol. While we don't have records of Anna's involvement

in the temperance the movement, death of her two young sons from illness and her desire to improve the lives of others is clearly reflected in the construction of a fountain of fresh water for the citizens of Providence. It is likely that Richmond the Fountain was the first public drinking



fountain in Providence, and possibly one of the very first constructed in America.

She selected the renowned Boston architectural firm of Ware & Van Brunt, which had created a fountain in the Boston Commons a few years earlier and was well known for their design of the First Church of Boston. They created a Gothic-style drinking fountain for the Athenæum of carved local granite, the style and design of which closely resemble the first drinking fountain constructed by the temperance society in London in 1859. Attached by a chain was a metal cup for passers-by to drink from.

Once the Board and the Building & Grounds Committee at the Athenæum had accepted the offer to construct the fountain, drawings were presented for approval and a special meeting of the members was called for a final vote. The Board later reported that the Water Commissioners of the city "had adopted the proposed fountain as one of the thirty drinking fountains, to be supplied with Pawtucket water . . . [and] erected for public use." However, it took a further two years for the city to get running water to the library, and seven years later there were still only three public drinking fountains listed in the city directory: the Athenæum Fountain,

> the Dalrymple Fountain in Roger Williams Park, and the drinking fountain donated by Anna's son, Frank E. Richmond at the corner of Angell near Brown Street.

> Many members of the Richmond family were library members, including Frank and Anna's daughter Caroline, and they continued

to be involved at the Athenæum. In our Archives is a portrait of three of Anna's granddaughters who posed for a *tableau vivant* – a form of entertainment portraying famous paintings in living tableau (see page 6). The portraits of the young ladies, Amy Dorrance Richmond Taylor, Mary Hepburn Parsons, and Anna Richmond, shows them posed as Past, Present, and Future from Malbone's delicate ivory miniature known as *The Hours* in the Athenæum's collection. Anna and her granddaughters are buried alongside other family members at the Richmond family plot at Swan Point Cemetery, overlooking the Seekonk River.

Though we can't promise that a trip to the fountain will keep you in Providence (or even recommend that you drink the water!), the Athenæum is so fortunate to have this piece of history which stands as a testament to the generosity of a forward-thinking woman and the ability of a library to gather its community and quench its thirst.

## A SPRING GARDEN PARTY

### Join us for a celebration on Sunday, May 20 from 2-4pm!

The Richmond Fountain is about to flow once again! You, along with your family, friends, and neighbors, are cordially invited to a spring garden party and open house at the Athenæum. Join us to watch Executive Director Matt Burriesci restart this "fountain of living water" and toast the occasion with prosecco and music. Tours of the library and children's activities will be offered, and light refreshments will be provided. All are welcome, and guests of all ages are encouraged.

More details to follow, so mark your calendar!

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### STAFF UPDATES

### A title addition and a new profile!

The committed and capable **Stephanie Ovoian** (née Knott – she celebrated her wedding at the library in the fall!) not only still serves as Reference & Special Collections Librarian, but has added Membership Manager to her title. She does it all!



And we're pleased to welcome **Conrad Fyfe** as our new custodian. He has been in the building and maintenance field for over 30 years, from

working for the school district in Gardiner, Maine as Head Custodian to a luxury apartment community as the Maintenance Manager for AvalonBay Communities, Inc. He enjoys playing guitar, landscaping, and spending as much time with his family as possible. He works mornings, so say hello if you're also here bright and early!

### SIX-MONTH SNAPSHOT

Since September...

23,593

Visitors to the Athenæum

Most popular title, fiction The House at Lobster Cove by Jane Goodrich

Most popular title, non-fiction (a tie!) The American Spirit by David McCullough & The Book of Joy by the Dalai Lama & Desmond Tutu

*Most popular title, children's Roller Girl* by Victoria Jamieson

> Most popular DVD Queen & Country

### **ROLL THE CREDITS!**

The Athenæum is so grateful to the myriad businesses, organizations, and individuals whose generosity makes life at the library possible: 1772 Foundation; Agniel Commodities, LLC; Campus Fine Wines; Carter Fund at the Rhode Island Foundation; Champlin Foundation; Chas A. Miller III & Birch Coffey; Easy Entertaining; Haffenreffer Family Fund at the Rhode Island Foundation; Herman H. Rose Civic, Cultural and Media Access Fund; Ida Ballou Littlefield Memorial Trust; Ira S. & Anna Galkin Charitable Trust; June Rockwell Levy Foundation; Mabel T. Woolley Trust; Mullen Scorpio Cerilli, CPAs; National Endowment for the Humanities; Pearl W. and Martin M. Silverstein Foundation; the Philbrick family; Residential Properties Ltd.; Rhode Island Historical Preservation & Heritage Commission; Rhode Island State Council on the Arts; Rustigian Rugs; Sharpe Family Foundation; Variable Data Printing; and Yankee Travel, Inc. We especially thank our Spring 2018 season sponsor *Bank of America*.

A hurrah and a handshake must go to this season's presenting partners: Audubon Society of Rhode Island; Brown Opera; Brown University Bookstore; Calef Brown; the Edna Lawrence Nature Lab at RISD; the English Speaking Union of Rhode Island; Goat Hill Writers; Linda Crotta Brennan; Providence Children's Film Festival; Quizmaster Alex Moffett; Guest Quizmaster Matthew Lawrence; Rhode Island Public Radio; and Rock-a-Baby.

As always we are deeply grateful to our devoted and determined Program Support Committee and other volunteers: Jennifer Kiddie (Volunteer-Wrangler-In-Chief), Leslie Atik, Murat Aydogdu, Jennifer Becker, Adele Bourne, Teresa Coda, Erin Dahill, Barbara Dunney, Peggy Edwards, Elizabeth Fajardo, Carl Farmer, Grace Farmer, Faith Fogle, Jen Shimkus Gazdacko, Sarah Gleason, Sally Godfrey, Ellen Goodlin, Greg Healy, Liz Hubbard, Lucia Huntley, Jennifer Huntley-Corbin, Jessica Kowal, Jane Lancaster, Rebecca Lebeau, Lucy Lepreau, Kate Menard, John Moran, Andy Morris, Elsie Morse, Caleb Murray, Ryan O'Connor, Joanne Oechler, Cynthia Shattuck, Carol Tatian, and Claire Uziel.

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## Bank of America 🖤

# HIDE HIDE

NATIONAL ENDOWMENT FOR THE HUMAINITIES

Any views, findings, conclusions, or recommendations expressed in this publication do not necessarily represent those of the National Endowment for the Humanities.

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### PENMAN CREDITS

Editor – Robin Wetherill, Director of Marketing & Communications

IMAGE CREDITS FROM THE COLLECTION

**COVER:** *The Girl Reading*, by Sir Joshua Reynolds, c1771.

#### **FOUNTAIN DETAIL:** Elevation and plan of the

Richmond Fountain, Ware & Van Brunt, 1873.

### FOUNTAIN DRAWING:

Presentation drawing of the Richmond Fountain, Ware & Van Brunt, 1873.

**FLOWER:** Rhododendron from *Familiar Flowers of Field and Garden*, described and illustrated by F. Schuyler Mathews, 1895.





THE PROVIDENCE ATHENÆUM

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