

Books & People

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Dr. Terence P. Thornberry

“A Wonderful Place to Grow Up”

Meet the Thornberry Family

by Sara Holliday, Events Coordinator

As staff will tell you on any tour, our building at 53 East 79th Street was built as a family home and converted into the New York Society Library in 1937. What you may not know is that the following decades saw another family at home here: the Thornberry family. As we move into the fall of our 260th year as an institution, I had the pleasure of chatting with Rose Mary Thornberry McLean and Dr. Terence Thornberry about their memories of growing up at the Library more than fifty years ago.



On a 2013 visit, Rose Mary Thornberry McLean showed her childhood home to her granddaughters, Claire, Eva, and Katherine Dice.

New Hours in 2015

We are excited to announce that the Library will be expanding its service hours in 2015. Beginning in January, the Library will be open until 8:00 PM on Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday and will be open 11:00 AM to 5:00 PM on Saturdays and Sundays throughout the year.



Meet the Thornberry Family continued

All the Great Houses

Patrick Thornberry left Ireland in 1929 at age 29, in pursuit of his sweetheart Rose. She had come to New York earlier that year on a visit, then found a job and decided to stay. They married in 1934, and their daughter Rose Mary was born in 1937. In 1943 Mr. Thornberry became the New York Society Library's



The Library in the 1950s

Building Superintendent. He, Rose, Rose Mary, and her brother Terence (born in 1945) lived in what is now "Closed Stack," the locked rare-book space opposite Stack 3.

Although the thought of living in a library or museum might call to mind E.L. Konigsberg's *From the Mixed-Up Files of Mrs. Basil E. Frankweiler*, at the time in New York it was hardly unusual. Caretaker families occupied all the neighborhood's great houses, whether they were principally homes, museums, or other institutions. With coal the only heat source, someone had to be on the premises twenty-four hours a day. The young Thornberrys attended grammar school at St. Ignatius Loyola on Park and 84th. Some of their schoolmates lived in the Yorkville branch of the Public Library, and others at 2 East 79th Street, now the Ukrainian Institute.

As I write, Closed Stack is fluorescent-lit and packed with dense movable shelving, but in the 1940s and 50s it was a sun-drenched, welcoming apartment. When newborn Terence came home from the hospital, the senior librarians and staff were invited for afternoon tea to welcome the infant. Ms. McLean and Dr. Thornberry recall many examples of this sort of relationship with the Library community: “It was a wonderful place to grow up, warm and engaging, surrounded by books and reading.”



The Children's Reading Room when Rose Mary and Terence were young

Daily Life on 79th Street

Among Rose Mary's earliest Library memories is the victory garden grown on the penthouse-level terrace during the Second World War. Tomatoes and greens flourished in large pots and windowboxes. After the war, flowers replaced the produce. The Head Librarian had sent many rare or fragile books and artworks into safer storage at the start of the war. In the late 1940s, Mr. Thornberry organized their return, and a ripple of excitement ran through the staff and family whenever another precious package arrived.

The Thornberrys came and went through the side door to the east of the main entrance, staying mostly behind the scenes during the Library's open hours. After 5 PM, though, “all of it was our home,” Ms. McLean emphasizes. Young

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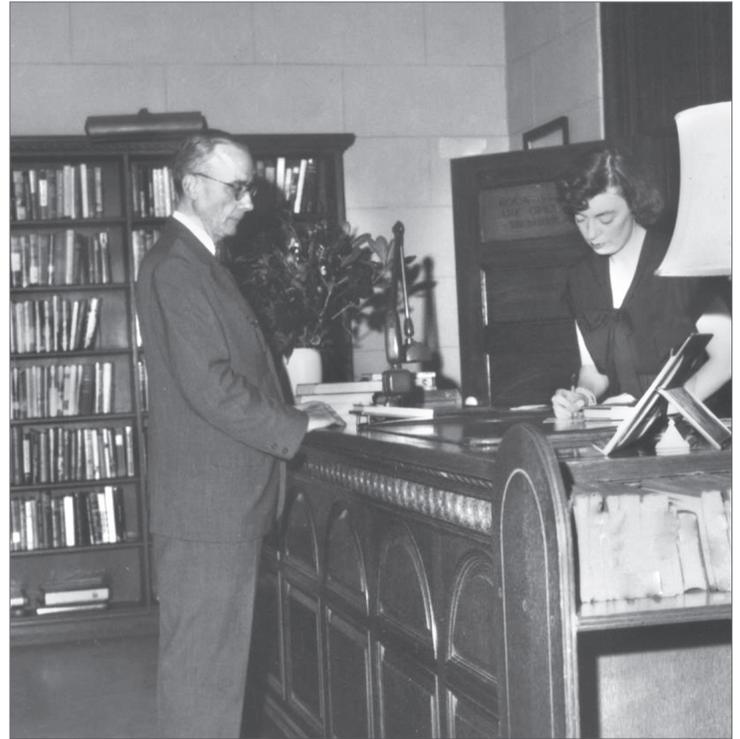
For instance:

- ◆ **\$50** provides 5 archival boxes to protect fragile books.
- ◆ **\$100** pays for 2 audiobooks.
- ◆ **\$250** purchases 20 picture books for the Children's Library.
- ◆ **\$500** gives all members one year of the digital edition of the *Oxford English Dictionary*, including remote access.
- ◆ **\$1,000** buys 50 new hardcover books.
- ◆ **\$2,500** underwrites an author lecture at a larger venue like the Kaye Playhouse.

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We hope we can count on you!

Thank you for your support.



Rose Mary and Terence enjoyed the elegant front rooms, studied the historic books and documents on display on the Second and Fifth Floors, and, most of all, read throughout the building. “We took it for granted,” Dr. Thornberry says with a rueful chuckle. Rose Mary even hosted the occasional weekend sleepover on the terrace—but everything had to be spic-and-span in time for the return of staff and members on Monday morning.

All four Thornberrys held Library positions according to their skills and age. Both Rose Mary and Terence fetched and reshelved books as pages, slipping in many furtive half-hours of reading in the stacks. Rose Mary later staffed the Circulation Desk, and Terence wrapped hundreds of books to be mailed to members. Then and now, books-by-mail is a major job, especially in the summer when members call from out of town. At the end of the day, Mr. Thornberry would collect the heavy canvas sacks of packages and take a taxi to the 70th Street post office. As an adult living in Albany years later, Dr. Thornberry got a lot of satisfaction out of requesting books by mail for himself.

The young Thornberrys also spent hours at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, at the American Museum of Natural History, and in Central Park. By modern standards the Met was empty after school. The guards knew the neighborhood

children and would smilingly tolerate the occasional game of hide-and-seek in the Egyptian galleries.

The Library itself was a smaller neighborhood in those days, with just one telephone number (Butterfield 8-6900), plus a separate line to the apartment—but that was for business, not chat. The membership in 1958 was about half its size today, though it could still feel busy: that year’s annual report describes “the parade of men, women, children—and dogs—through the halls.” As now, authors and others of note came and went quietly, and the Thornberrys were careful not to exclaim when they spotted a famous face. Librarian Marion King once made an exception, excitedly calling the eight year old Rose Mary to the lobby to meet the elderly Maude Adams. Adams (1872-1953) was an actress best known for creating the role of Peter Pan in J.M. Barrie’s 1905 play. Ms. McLean remembers greeting author and Library trustee Walter Lord as he came in to research *A Night to Remember*, retrieving the bound *New York Times* volumes with the original articles on the *Titanic’s* sinking.

The Library has never had a dress code, but the “social code” encouraged patrons to dress and behave with decorum. “Of course,” Ms. McLean points out, “in those days you wore gloves to church, the theater, and the bank!”



Previous page, left: Rose, Terence, and Patrick Thornberry entertain family friends in the Members' Room after a holiday dinner. Right: Staffer Patricia Slingo (Price) assists a member, early 1950s.

Above: Helen Ruskell at her Circulation Desk station. Right: Sylvia Hilton at the Circulation Desk shortly after her start at the Library.



The Triumvirate

Mr. Thornberry and his family were particularly friendly with Edith Hall Crowell, Head Librarian from 1936 to 1954; Marion Morrison King, a staff member from 1907 to 1953; Helen Ruskell, on the staff from 1920 to 1977; and later Sylvia Hilton, Head Librarian 1954-1978. Miss Crowell, Mrs. King, and Miss Ruskell were “the triumvirate” who knew all the doings of the Library and created its unique tone for most of the twentieth century.

Mrs. King and Miss Ruskell were as different in appearance and manner as could be imagined but worked side-by-side as an indissoluble team for decades. Mrs. King presided over the Reference Desk, a comfortable armchair by her side for those asking complex questions. Miss Ruskell was a fixture at the Circulation Desk. Between them, they knew all the books and everyone who took them out, including the voracious young readers who lived on the floor below.

Marion King, a small, conservatively dressed lady, could seem aloof at first glance, but had a quirky sense of humor. Ms. McLean remarks now how much she was ahead of her time: having joined the Library staff as a single girl in 1907, Mrs. King proceeded to marry, have a daughter, Alice Gore King, and yet thrive in her job. She was groundbreaking, “but in a most ladylike way.” (Mrs. King also authored the Library’s

charming mid-century history, *Books & People*, in 1954, doing part of the writing in the Fifth Floor study rooms.)

Lively Helen Ruskell greeted all comers heartily and knew just how to communicate with many kinds of people. Dr. Thornberry recalls a year when the Yankees were in the World Series. Anxious for an update on the score, he sneaked down from page duties to find both his father and Miss Ruskell glued to the TV set in the family apartment.

Edith Hall Crowell, the Library’s first female Head Librarian, was a formidably intelligent college graduate who particularly mentored young Rose Mary. Miss Crowell oversaw the Library’s move from University Place to 79th Street in 1936-37 and maintained professional relationships with other institutions all over the city. At a gathering at the Society for Ethical Culture, Rose Mary was surprised to find that Miss Crowell had a strong and lovely singing voice—not a gift she was able to display in the Library itself. The Head Librarian’s Fourth Floor apartment was the sunniest place in the building, and its visitors were disappointed when taller buildings eventually went up around the Library, blocking some of the light.

Miss Crowell retired in 1954, just after the Library’s 200th anniversary. The Thornberrys were concerned that her successor, Sylvia Hilton, might want to overhaul the staff, but she turned out to fit in well with the family downstairs.



Above: Rose and Patrick Thornberry in their Library apartment at Christmastime.
Right: Patrick Thornberry with his daughter Rose Mary on her wedding day, 1965. They are standing on the Second Floor main staircase.



Miss Hilton was quiet and proper, but her pastimes included not only birdwatching but also traveling on safari. In 1956, she interceded with the Board to grant Mr. Thornberry a special four-week vacation so he and his family could visit Ireland, for the first time since he and his wife left in 1929.

Rose and Patrick Thornberry instilled the certainty that college and graduate studies would be a normal part of their children's lives. Both Miss Crowell and Miss Hilton not only concurred, but also gave advice and encouragement on study and research habits. Dr. Thornberry, who lived at home during his undergraduate years, fondly remembers doing homework in the Reference Room and leafing through the Library's Audubon elephant folios in spare moments.

Other staff who linger in memory include rare book librarian Marjorie Watkins, a "live wire" who walked to work each day wearing matching dress, gloves, and shoes. Polly Fenton, the head of cataloging in the early 1950s, was another "perfect lady" who set an elegant tone.

The Building Then and Now

As mentioned, Closed Stack and what is now the Fourth-Floor Cataloging Department were private homes for much of the twentieth century. Cataloging staff were based in what is now the Whitridge Room on the Third Floor, and all new books were funnelled there.

Ms. McLean and Dr. Thornberry recall the installation of microfiche storage (in about 1963) as a big step forward in technology. The cabinets sat opposite the main elevator on the First Floor and allowed much faster and more convenient searching of the *New York Times* in particular. Much debate ensued on where to locate the enormous volumes of bound periodicals whose contents were now duplicated on film.

The Members' Room is eternal, quiet and electronics-free from then to now, with current periodicals always to hand. In the Thornberrys' era, however, every table sported an ashtray. Smoking was banned everywhere but the Members' Room in 1961, and throughout the building in the 1970s.

Later Years

The closeness of staff and trustees with the Thornberrys was underlined at Rose Mary's wedding reception, held at home at the Library in August 1965. In the years when no public or catered events took place in the Library, Board Chair Arnold Whitridge nevertheless granted special permission for the family to hold Rose Mary's wedding reception in the building. Bartenders replaced librarians at the Circulation Desk, caterers served food from the long table in the Reference Room, a string quartet played from the east elevator alcove, and guests ate and socialized in the Members' Room. Guests included many Library staff and friends.



Rose Mary McLean's wedding reception, 1965. Miss Ruskell is standing at lower right with hat, cigarette, and cocktail. Note the grandfather clock in its former location at the southwest corner of the Circulation Hall.

In 1967 Mr. and Mrs. Thornberry retired and gave up the sunny apartment where they had lived for twenty-four years. In that year's annual report, Head Librarian Sylvia Hilton writes,

“The Library has...been fortunate in its Staff, but changes inevitably come. After 24 years as Building Superintendent, Mr. Patrick Thornberry announced his retirement this spring. Mr. and Mrs. Thornberry came to the Library in 1943. Their son and daughter grew up here and, indeed, at one time or another the whole family has served on the Staff. Mr. Thornberry's knowledge of machinery and his ingenuity along with his never-failing sense of responsibility enabled the Library to function efficiently and the Librarian to enjoy peace of mind. Mr. and Mrs. Thornberry can look with satisfaction upon years of work well done and with pride upon the accomplishments of their children. It is with gratitude that we wish them many happy years ahead.”

The elder Thornberrys did not move far. They took an apartment over what is now the EAT restaurant around the corner. Library staffers Janet Howard and Linnea Holman Savapoulas enjoyed delivering books and staying to visit in the 1970s and 1980s. Patrick Thornberry died in 1986, and Rose Thornberry in 2005, at the age of 102.

Today, their daughter Rose Mary McLean and her husband James, a retired physician, live in their lakeside home in Maine. Terence Thornberry is Distinguished University Professor of criminology at the University of Maryland and lives in Washington, D.C. with his wife Pamela.

No Thornberrys live at 53 East 79th Street now, but the Library's good condition and ongoing spirit owe much to their legacy. As we move toward this institution's 261st year, we hope that the friendliness and gentility—and, most of all, the love of books—of their era continue to characterize everything we do.

SPECIAL THANKS TO JOAN ZIMMETT FOR HER WORK ON THIS ARTICLE.

A Happy Anniversary: Staff and Friends Gather to Honor Janet Howard

Janet Howard celebrated a monumental fifty years on the Library staff with a reception on September 17. Staff members, Board members, and friends enjoyed remarks from former Chair of the Board Charles G. Berry, former Assistant Head Librarian Jane Goldstein, Head Librarian Mark Bartlett, and members Jules Cohn and Gayle Feldman. They spoke of the wonderful service and friendship that Janet has provided for so many members over fifty years. As Ms. Goldstein put it, “Members got the books they wanted to read—the essence of Library membership.” Janet was presented with a beautiful scene of New York City painted by Library member Peter Salwen. (More about his work at salwen.com.)

Past staff in attendance included Sharon Brown, Andrew Corbin, Elizabeth Denlinger, Doris Glick, Andrea Griffith, Heidi Hass, Brian Kenney, Kathleen McKiernan, and Tinamarie Vella.

Janet came to the Library as a recent high-school graduate in the fall of 1964. She was a mainstay of the Circulation Department for many years and now works upstairs as Acquisitions Assistant. We wish her many more happy years at the Library.





Previous page, clockwise from top left: Janet with Book Committee members Richard Aspinwall and Jules Cohn; Janet (center) with Head Librarian Mark Bartlett and volunteer Edméé Reit; member Gayle Feldman with Janet; the guestbook handmade by George Muñoz; member Marion Cuba with Janet. This page: the painting by Peter Salwen, a gift to Janet from the Library; the cake; current staff gather to honor our good friend Janet.

A Meaningful Gift



The Thoreau journal fragment in a volume of the collection

Earlier this year, the Library received a significant gift from trustee Barbara Goldsmith: a twenty-volume manuscript edition of writings by Henry David Thoreau, originally owned by her father. Only six hundred copies of this edition were printed by Houghton Mifflin in 1906. The collection, edited by F.B. Sanborn and B. Torrey, includes not only Thoreau's famous books *Walden* and *A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers*, but also *The Maine Woods*, poems, short prose works, and selected correspondence.

The collection also offers a fragment of a handwritten page from Thoreau's journals, containing passages from two separate works later published under the titles "Faith in a Seed" and "Wild Fruits." This page is currently on display in the Peluso Family Exhibition Gallery, in the small case next to the marble bust.

Thoreau lived in New York City for eight months in 1843, hoping for paid work as a magazine writer. Although he failed to find a long-term position, he did meet notable

people in the cultural world, including Horace Greeley and (Library member) Henry James Sr. He also completed "A Winter Walk," which his biographer Robert D. Richardson Jr. calls "his first fully mature piece of writing."

In October 1843, Thoreau wrote his mother, "I read a good deal and am pretty well known in the libraries of New York. Am in with the Librarian, one Dr. Forbes, of the Society Library—who has lately been to Cambridge to learn liberality, and has come back to let me take out some un-take-out-able books, which I was threatening to read on the spot." (Philip J. Forbes was Head Librarian from 1828 to 1855.) Thoreau may have been introduced to our Library by Ralph Waldo Emerson, who gave a series of lectures in our building at Broadway and Leonard Street.

The Library is honored to add to our collection this beautiful set of one of the essential American authors. As Chair of the Board Barbara Hadley Stanton said, "the Library is just the right place for it."

Staff Changes

The Library has made some staff changes recently, and our frequent visitors may have noticed new faces at the Circulation Desk and working in the stacks. In September we welcomed three new staff members, and two existing staffers moved into new positions.

Cathy McGowan joined the staff as our new weekend Circulation Assistant. She holds a BFA from Southern Methodist University and a Master's in Library and Information Science from UCLA. Cathy was most recently a Librarian with the County of Los Angeles Public Library. In her spare time, Cathy likes classical music, attending the theater, and reading historical fiction. She enjoys meeting our members and working with patrons at the front desk.

New Circulation Assistant Simen Kot may be a familiar face to some Library members. Simen has worked in the Library as a page since May 2013 but will now be seen out front at the Circulation Desk. He earned his BA in American History from Queens College and continues to enjoy reading historical nonfiction in his spare time. Simen plans to enter the Library and Information Science program at Pratt Institute in the spring.

Simen is filling the position left vacant by Bobbie Lee Crow, who has moved upstairs to the Systems Department. Bobbie has been with the Library since 2010, when he began working as a page.

The Library has also recently welcomed two new pages, Morgan Aronson and Karissa Durler. Morgan comes to us with a BA in Political Science and Russian Studies from McGill University and a Master's degree in The Book: History and Techniques of Analysis from The University of St Andrew's. She is currently a student in the Palmer School of Library and Information Science. Karissa has a degree in Photographic Imaging and is currently studying English Language and Literature. She hopes eventually to earn her Master's in Library Science. Members will see Morgan and Karissa giving tours throughout the building, shelving books, and maintaining order in the stacks.

We congratulate all of these staff members on their new positions!



From top: Simen Kot,
Karissa Durler,
Morgan Aronson, and
Cathy McGowan





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One More Picture



Edith Wharton in Paris with five American soldiers, 1917. The two men on the right are Archie and Quentin Roosevelt, sons of President Theodore Roosevelt and (Library patron) Edith Kermit Roosevelt. The seated soldier is James Russell Parsons. His mother Frances Theodora Parsons published the 1893 bestseller *How to Know the Wild Flowers* under the name Mrs. William Starr Dana. We are grateful to Mr. Parsons' son-in-law, Robert M. Pennoyer, for sharing this photograph.

The exhibition *From the Western Front and Beyond: The Writings of World War One* is open to the public in the Peluso Family Exhibition Gallery through December 31, 2014.