

# Books & People

## IN THIS ISSUE



Summer Reading  
PAGE 4



Spring Events and Awards  
PAGE 6

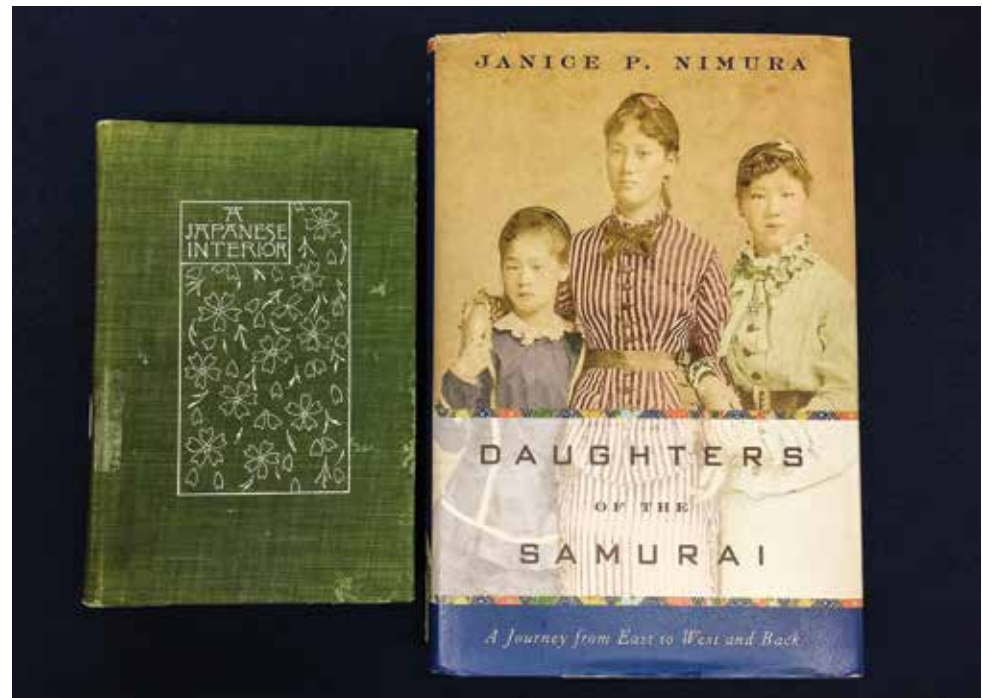
## Remembering Christopher Gray

PAGE 11

## A Trip to the Stacks

by Carolyn Waters, Head Librarian

A short while ago, I found member writer Susan Cheever wandering about the Library and looking a little bit like she had lost something. I asked if everything was all right. “Yes, but I’m looking for inspiration. If I don’t know what to write next, the answer is in the stacks.”



There isn't a day that goes by that I don't hear an impassioned paean to our book stacks. And more often than not, it will be from one of our member writers. The New York Society Library is not a research library, at least not in the same way that other institutions that collect primary source materials are. But as the oldest library in New York City, with a justifiable reputation as a real reader's collection, our bookshelves hold incomparable riches that are rarely found in gloriously browsable open book stacks. All of us, whether we're writers or readers, have stories about that accidental but fortuitous discovery on the shelf, the hidden gem sitting one inch away from the book you were actually looking for. That kind of serendipity just isn't possible without open stacks.



## Greetings from the Head Librarian

In the Author's Note in her Pulitzer Prize-winning *The Guns of August*, Barbara Tuchman wrote "My thanks go also to the New York Society Library for the continuing hospitality of its stacks and the haven of a place to write."

Those welcoming open stacks continue to enchant readers and writers alike. The Library's collection of some 300,000 volumes reflects the reading tastes of New Yorkers over the past 263 years, and that pursuit continues as Head of Acquisitions Steve McGuirl, Acquisitions Assistants Patrick Rayner and Janet Howard, and the Children's Librarians gauge member interest and scrupulously select every title that is added to our stacks. So it is with eternal gratitude that I thank all of you who contributed to our Spring Appeal in support of our collections. Current and future generations of New Yorkers will reap the benefits of your generosity.

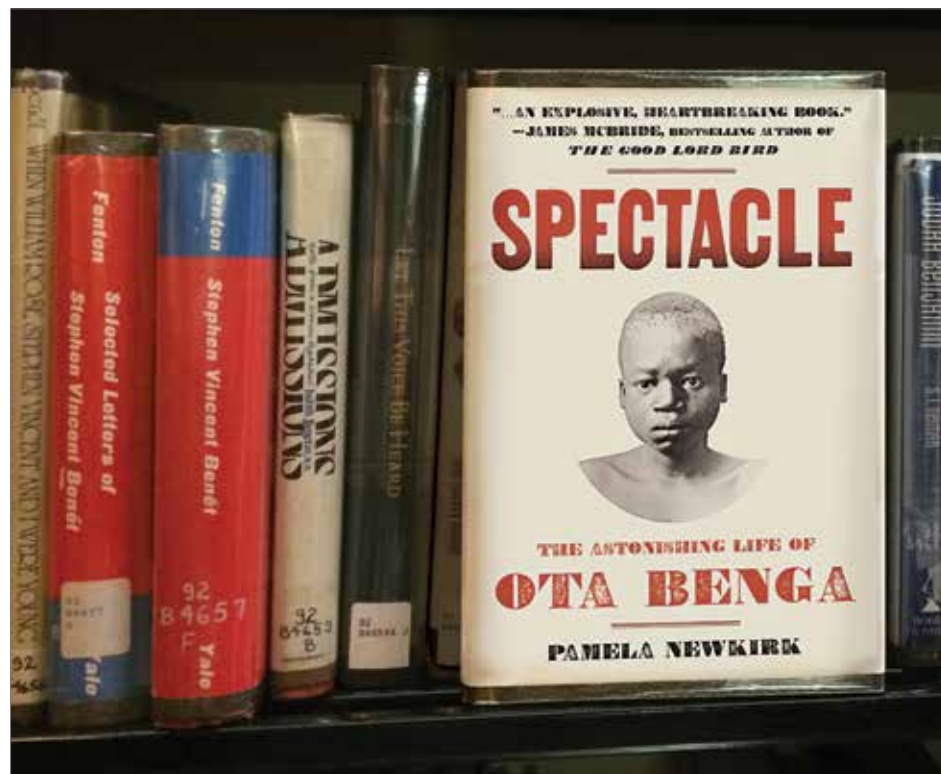
And more than ever, we remain a place for writers to flourish. If you wander the building, you will find them vigorously typing away in the Hornblower Room and the Whitridge Room, and at the snug workspaces in the stacks. So I'm particularly thrilled to report that as I type this column, we've just upgraded our internet to blazing fast fiber optic cable, providing further sustenance to the writers—and to the scholars, teachers, students, and other members who have found a place to work here.

A happy summer of reading and writing to you all!

## A Trip to the Stacks continued

Sometimes it's the spine or the cover that compels us to ease a particular book off the shelf and take a closer look. While perusing stack 1, Janice Nimura discovered a little green volume with an art deco cover design and the title *A Japanese Interior*. Nimura had been fishing for a book topic, and she was captivated by Alice Mabel Bacon's 1893 book chronicling her life in a Japanese home. For a long time, Nimura thought she would write about Alice, since her voice was distinctly different from those in the other travel narratives and diaries of the time that she found in call number 915.2. But *A Japanese Interior* (since moved to Closed Stacks due to its fragile condition) turned out to be the portal to a bigger story. Intrigued by the unnamed Japanese women Bacon wrote about living with, Nimura followed Bacon's trail and discovered three fascinating lives that evolved into Nimura's highly praised 2016 book *Daughters of the Samurai: A Journey from East to West and Back* (952 N).

The potential for research in our stacks cannot be understated either. Pamela Newkirk, a journalist and NYU professor, won both the NAACP Image Award and the Hurston/Wright Legacy Award in Nonfiction for her most recent book *Spectacle: The Astonishing Life of Ota Benga* (92 B4662 N). Newkirk found



that the Library's open stacks were filled with accounts of people and events published in and around 1906, the year Ota Benga was shockingly and shamefully featured in an exhibit at the Bronx Zoo. Newkirk says that the Library's significant collection of titles from the turn of the century turned out to be "a whole treasure trove of books on old New York which enriched the research I was doing." The many first-person accounts from the period, all on open shelves, helped Newkirk fill in gaps, establish the ideology of the period, and take a closer look at the thinkers and influencers behind major New York City institutions in their own time.

Award-winning playwright Rob Ackerman is currently working on a new play, *Harding*, about the consequences of failed leadership. "It's like *Waiting for Godot*," he says, "President Harding never shows up." Ackerman has been browsing and reading his way through call number 92 H263 on stack 7. Like Newkirk, Ackerman was also surprised to find so many first-person accounts from the time period he was researching. Ackerman says "People think of plays as talk, but they're more a matter of listening. The people I'm conjuring are all dead. Their voices live in books." He found accounts by the major players who knew Harding best, including his mistress Nan Britton, the attorney general, and the detective in charge at the White House. "Now I'm reading a 1932 book in your collection, *Warren Gamaliel Harding, an American Comedy* (92 H263 W). Clement Wood, its author, was a socialist, atheist, and political activist. At first I dismissed him as having too much of an agenda. But he's a compelling writer who peppers his story with slang, sex, and surprising logic. There's no way I'd be reading him without the NYSL."

Subject listings in online catalogs are great resources, but they are sometimes inadequate for deep exploration. While researching her most recent book, *Drinking in America: Our Secret History* (394.1 C), bestselling writer Susan Cheever pulled 30 books a day from the shelves, looking for ones with an index, poring through them to find instances of "drinking," "whiskey," "drunk,"



"intemperance," and other words she began to discover would lead her to information she was looking for. She says, "There was no way to do it except to sit on the floor and go through indexes. Without the open stacks, I never could have done it. And I found stuff."

Doing research for a project, or simply looking for inspiration, a trip to our marvelous open stacks can be an enlightening experience. You never know what you will find. As Ackerman says, "there are people in these stacks yearning to be heard."

## Our Longest Membership: Nancy Ward Berry by Charles G. Berry



Former Chair of the Board Charles G. Berry with Nancy Ward Berry, fall 2016.

My mother, Nancy Ward Berry, died at age 94 on March 17. She had been a member of the Society Library since she graduated from the Brearley School in 1941. The Library and reading were a vital part of her life. From early childhood she read constantly, often to improve her mind and always for pleasure. She particularly loved Jane Austen, whose insight into human character she greatly valued. But her reading ranged widely, from 19th- and 20th-century English and American literature to contemporary fiction, history of art, mysteries, and spy novels. My mother was always glad to hear that a book on reserve had become available, and she enjoyed walking the four blocks from her apartment to pick up a prized volume. As much as she loved the Library's collection, she deeply appreciated the staff. She often mentioned to me their courtesy, helpfulness and knowledge. She enjoyed chatting with them and with generations of Head Librarians and fondly remembered the redoubtable Miss Ruskell. After my mother's death I was touched to find near the phone on her desk a pictorial guide of the staff, a ready reference as she called the Library for more of the books that sustained her for 76 years of membership.



# Summer Reads *Book Recommendations*

As the weather gets warm and the days grow long, the ideal companion is a good book. The following are our annual summer reading recommendations, as well as titles we look forward to reading this summer.

The best book I've read recently is *American War* by Omar El Akkad (Lobby Fiction), a debut novel of unusual urgency. It's set sixty years in the future, in a United States fractured by a second Civil War. The protagonist flees with her family from Louisiana and grows up in a tent city in Tennessee. Here, we witness her transformation from refugee to rebel soldier/terrorist. Like other novels of its kind, *1984* and *The Road* to name but two, the dystopia in *American War* is crafted from current world crises, notably those of the United States and Middle East, and yet it avoids didacticism and provides no easy answers.

—Patrick Rayner, Circulation/  
Acquisitions Assistant

When I think of summer, I think of epic road trips across the country. Someday I'll have time for that. In the meantime, my hankering for the open road ought to be satisfied by William Least Heat Moon's *Blue Highways: A Journey into America* (917.3 H), Larry McMurtry's *Roads: Driving America's Great Highways* (917.3 M), and Robert Sullivan's *Cross Country* (917.3 S). And who can resist a title like Irving D. Tessler's *With Malice Toward All* (917.3 T) with the subject listing "Automobiles—Tours"? Check back for a full report.

—Carolyn Waters, Head Librarian

In Emil Ferris's *My Favorite Thing is Monsters* (Lobby Nonfiction), a young girl named Karen, who sees herself as a monster and loves to draw imaginary horror magazine covers, narrates her life living with her mom and older brother in late 1960s Chicago. When their upstairs neighbor, a beautiful exile from Nazi Germany, is found murdered in her apartment, Karen



sets out to find whodunit. *My Favorite Thing is Monsters* is Ferris's debut graphic novel and it is epic in proportion and scope, accomplishing things I've never seen another artist do with simple materials like ordinary notebook paper and ballpoint pens. Her many-layered story haunted me for weeks after I finished it.

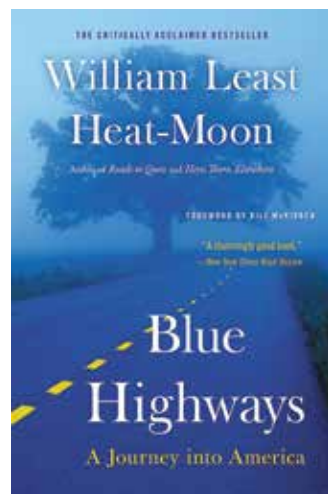
—Katie Fricas, Events/  
Circulation Assistant

It is easy to imagine taking in the entirety of David Garnett's 1922 novel *Lady into Fox* (F G) over a long, quiet summer day. The lady and the fox of the title is Sylvia Tebrick, who suddenly and inexplicably turns into a fox while out walking with her husband, Richard. Garnett (a long-time associate of the Bloomsbury Group) carefully melds humor, fantasy and realism to chronicle Richard and Sylvia's difficult adjustment to their predicament. It sounds light, and its 91 pages go by quickly, but this is a beautiful and at times painful tale that explores darker, deeper realms of love, devotion, and more.

—Steven McGuirl, Head of Acquisitions

If you want some suspense for the summer, *The Woman in Cabin 10*, by Ruth Ware (Lobby Fiction, and ebook), will have you enthralled. The small luxury cruise ship on which the story is set provides a claustrophobic atmosphere where all of the passengers—including a young travel journalist on a plum assignment—are suspicious. A classically styled thriller (à la *Murder on the Orient Express*), this book keeps the surprises coming up to the end.

—Cathy McGowan, Circulation Librarian



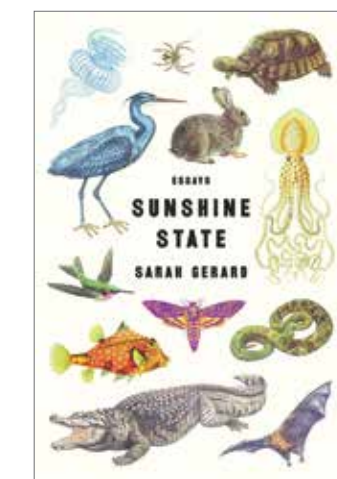
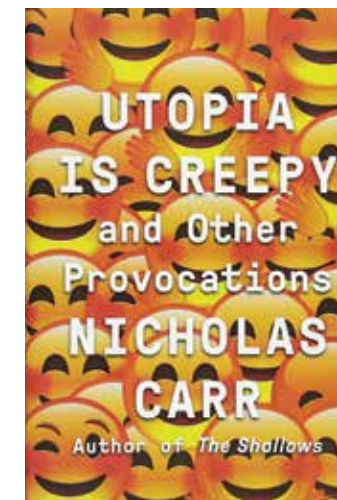
Need some motivation for a vacation from your devices? Check out *Utopia is Creepy and Other Provocations* by Nicholas Carr (301.2 C). Though tech-savvy and Web-loving, these pick & mix short takes from the last twelve years provide needed perspective, especially on the corporate agendas and utopian thinking we often absorb uncritically from our screens. "What I want from technology is not a new world," Carr realizes. "What I want from technology are tools for exploring and enjoying the world that is—the world that comes to us thick with 'things counter, original, spare, strange,' as Gerard Manley Hopkins long ago described it."

—Sara Holliday, Head of Events

I haven't finished reading *Sunshine State* by fellow Floridian Sarah Gerard (Lobby Fiction) yet, but that won't stop me from recommending it now. I'm only three essays in and I'm already hooked. Gerard's writing is a mix of personal history and journalistic backstory, deeply felt and often droll, and deftly illuminates the ways that we spin fantasies as children and as adults, whether they are ideas about who we are, who our loved ones are, or what our choices mean. Maybe you'll find yourself reading it as you eat a grouper sandwich at a Pinellas County beach this summer.

—Mia D'Avanza, Head of Circulation

*The Go-Between*, by L.P. Hartley (FH) is one of the most beautiful books I've read in recent years, so I'm really looking forward to spending my summer with his trilogy known as *Eustace and Hilda*. Hartley is masterful at describing childhood, which is where this story of an extraordinarily close brother and sister begins. In her introduction to the New York Review of Books edition, Anita Brookner writes,



"the novel is so expertly written that one hardly notices the skill which informs it."

Diane Srebnick  
Membership/Development Assistant

## YOUNG ADULT

I missed my stop on the train while reading *Speed of Life* (YA-MS W)! This compelling and absorbing new novel from Society Library member writer Carol Weston draws the reader into the life, mind, and heart of Sofia, a 14-year-old New Yorker grieving the sudden death of her mother, with some help from advice columnist "Dear Kate." Throughout an eventful and challenging year Sofia navigates the complicated realities of "life goes on" in realistic and relatable fashion with a mix of vulnerability, curiosity, and strength. Meet the author at a Library event on November 9 (look for details in our fall events newsletter).

—Randi Levy,  
Head of the Children's Library

Whether it be the Beatles, One Direction, or countless others, boy bands have long been making teenagers go to extremes. In *Kill the Boy Band* by Goldy Moldavsky (Lobby Young Adult), readers are introduced to The Ruperts and their devoted fan base, known as Strepurs. Four fangirls are huddled in a NYC hotel room strategizing how to meet them when they unintentionally kidnap one of the boys. Many twists and turns follow as each gal vies to spin this unique opportunity to her advantage. How many Ruperts remain at the end of this crazy tale? Take this one to the beach for a hilarious read peppered with subtle feminist rhetoric and love for 80s flicks.

—Susan Vincent Molinaro,  
Children's Librarian



# The Goodhue Society

Members of the Library's bequest society, named for our generous benefactor Sarah Parker Goodhue, gathered for the annual reception in their honor on April 26th. They were joined by author Terry McDonell and later attended

his lecture on *The Accidental Life*. To learn more about the Goodhue Society, please contact Joan Zimmet at 212.288.6900 x207 or [jzimmett@nysoclib.org](mailto:jzimmett@nysoclib.org). Photos by Karen Smul.

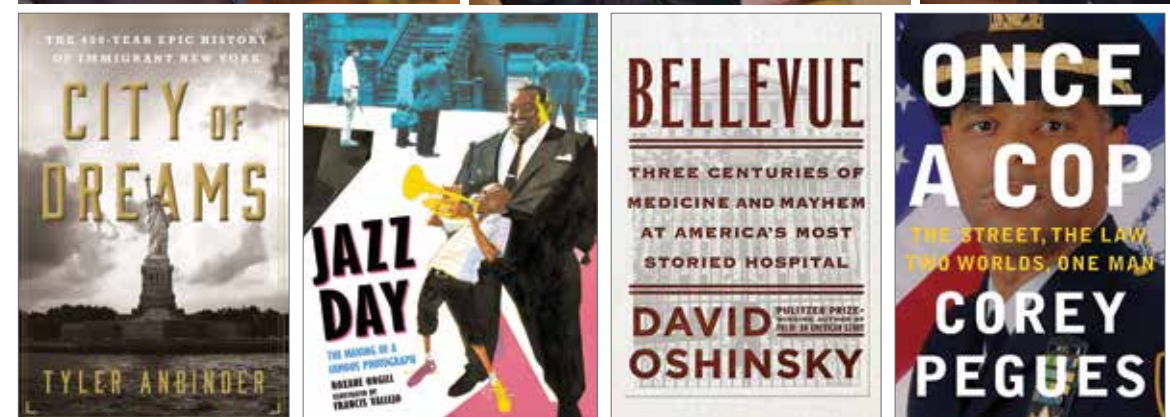


Top: Joel Rubin and Mark Barron with Cynthia Hanson; Molly Haskell and Patricia Volk with Goodhue Society Chair William J. Dean.  
Bottom: Author Terry McDonell with Chair of the Board Carol Collins Malone; Dr. Yale Kramer, Rita Kramer, and Claude Bloch.

# The New York City Book Awards 2016-17

The New York City Book Awards celebrated the 2016-2017 winners with a ceremony and reception on May 3. Head Librarian Carolyn Waters, Book Awards Jury chair Warren Wechsler, and Library trustee Ellen M. Iseman spoke about

the history and importance of the awards, followed by presentations from jurors and words from the winning authors about their outstanding New York City books. See our website for full details on the winners and ceremony. Photos by Karen Smul.



Top: Library trustee Ellen M. Iseman; trustees Ralph S. Brown Jr. and Daniel M. Rossner with Nancy Chang and Elizabeth Brown; winning author Tyler Anbinder. Middle: Winners Corey Pegues and David Oshinsky; Book Awards Jury Chair Warren Wechsler with winner Roxane Orgill.

THE 2016-2017 NEW YORK CITY BOOK AWARDS ARE GENEROUSLY UNDERWRITTEN BY ELLEN M. ISEMAN.



# Writing Life Events

The April 13 Literary Magazine Salon featured readings and a panel discussion from the online magazines *Digging Through The Fat* and *Guernica*. On May 11, the Library

co-sponsored a panel with the *Hudson Review* celebrating the publication of *Literary Awakenings: Personal Essays from the Hudson Review*.



Top: *Guernica* panelists Raluca Albu, Meara Sharma, Carmen Maria Machado, and Ann Neumann; *Digging Through The Fat* reader Lauren Hilger. Middle: Guests enjoying the readers' books and the reception before the presentations. Bottom: *Hudson Review* presenters Ronald Koury, Paula Deitz, Sir Andrew Motion, Susan Balée, William H. Pritchard, and Igor Webb; Helene Brenkman with *Hudson Review* editor Paula Deitz.

THE WRITING LIFE EVENTS IN 2017 ARE GENEROUSLY UNDERWRITTEN BY JENNY LAWRENCE.

# The Young Writers Awards

The annual Young Writers Awards celebrate excellent writing by students in the Library community. Every child who participated was honored at a ceremony and reception on May 17. Writers Dave Johnson, Robert Quackenbush,

Carol Weston, and Edra Ziesk presented the awards and offered encouraging words about the writing life. Visit [tinyurl.com/ywa2017](http://tinyurl.com/ywa2017) to read the winning entries. Photo by Karen Smul.

## Winners:

- Zohar Lindemann, "Winter" (3rd & 4th Grade Poetry)
- Maeve Shepardson, "Pool Party" (3rd & 4th Grade Prose)
- Alexa Balodis, "Alone" (5th & 6th Grade Poetry)
- Juliet Burguières, "Anika" (5th & 6th Grade Prose)
- Una Roven, "School Bathroom" (7th & 8th Grade Poetry)
- Rebecca Arian, "If Only" (7th & 8th Grade Prose)
- Iznara Benoit Kornhauser, "Orianne" (9th-12th Grade Poetry)

## Honorable Mentions:

- Kaela Glaser, "Mysterious, Delicious" (3rd & 4th Grade Poetry)
- Sophie Kim-Yatter, "The Blurry New York Life" (3rd & 4th Grade Prose)
- Samara Choudhury, "When They Came" (5th & 6th Grade Poetry)
- Miller Goldsmith, "Fire" (5th & 6th Grade Poetry)
- Anya Levin, "The Hands of the Phoenix" (5th & 6th Grade Prose)



Take note of these young faces: someday you may find them on a book jacket in our stacks.

THE YOUNG WRITERS AWARDS ARE GENEROUSLY SUPPORTED BY JEANETTE SARKISIAN WAGNER.



# The New Members Party

Members who joined within the last year enjoyed a reception and building tours on June 5. Welcoming remarks were given by Head Librarian Carolyn Waters and novelist Lauren Belfer, author most recently of *And After the Fire*. Photos by Karen Smul.



Clockwise from top left: Zareen Sethna with Board Chair Carol Collins Malone and Jonathan Ramos; Head Librarian Carolyn Waters; Katy and Zach Maggio; Ethan Park speaks to guest host Roger F. Pasquier; Jennifer Blood with speaker Lauren Belfer and trustee Adrienne Ingram.

# Remembering Christopher Gray

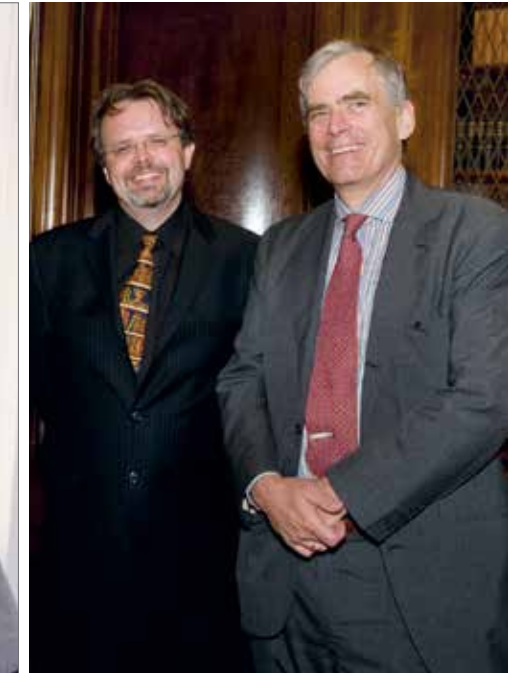
by Jean Parker Phifer, Library Trustee

We at the New York Society Library mourn the recent death of Christopher Gray (1950-2017), architectural historian and sleuth par excellence, author of the acclaimed *New York Times* Streetscapes column 1987-2014, and enthusiastic member and former trustee of the Library.

Christopher officially joined the Library in 1989, although he frequented it for many years before that. He served as the inaugural chair of the New York City Book Awards jury from 1995 to 1999 and continued to serve on the jury until 2004. His own book *New York Streetscapes: Tales of Manhattan's Significant Buildings and Landmarks* (co-written with Suzanne Braley), a collection of some of his Streetscapes columns, received a Special Citation of Merit in the 2003 New York City Book Awards. He lectured in the Members' Room about *New York Streetscapes* to a packed house on June 10, 2003.

Christopher served as a trustee of the library from 1998 to 2005. He was, of course, a valuable and vocal contributor to all matters relating to our historic building. In 1998 he wrote the continually useful *The John S. Rogers House: A Brief Literature Search*. He even dressed as George Washington to give building tours at the Library's 250th anniversary party in April 2004. Having climbed throughout the nooks and crannies of our building, he goaded us to restore the handsome skylight over the main stair, which had been covered over with sheetrock earlier in the 20th century. Even though the skylight would receive no natural light due to infilling of the structure above, Christopher convinced the building committee that it could be handsomely lit with artificial light, and he was proven right. The project was generously supported by Ada Peluso and Romano Peluso in 2010.

Christopher was an early major supporter of the conservation of the First Charging Ledger in 2010 and the creation of the online resource now called *City Readers*. He also offered his time as speaker at the inaugural celebration of the Goodhue Society in 2010.



Christopher at the anniversary party and with former Head Librarian Mark Bartlett.

But on top of his many contributions to the Library, Christopher developed a large fan base for his colorful and highly evocative writing. One of our favorite columns, from 2011, is aptly titled "The Encyclopedia Out the Window." It describes the differing character of the four buildings facing the corner of West End Avenue and 88th Street, where Christopher lived in his younger days. Describing 574 West End Avenue he says, "The Chautauqua's lobby was vast—as big as a four-bedroom apartment, a dark, heavy expanse of deeply veined marble, like a sheet of Bavarian pastry. It...might have been the ballroom of an ocean liner... You could have learned to drive in that lobby." By contrast, he says about the designer of 575 West End Avenue, "Ajello's trademark was to wring grandeur out of a lobby not in square feet, but in cubic feet, for he almost always insisted on a story and a half for the entrance."

Christopher's passion for historic architecture, for New York City and for our Library made it a joy to know him and work with him. We will miss his scholarly demeanor (leavened by the twinkle in his eye), his startling insights, and his quirky humor. Every time we pass under the skylight brightening the main stairwell, we will be glad that he added so much to our appreciation of the Library's storied past and to the fellowship of those within its historic walls.

Thanks to Sara Holliday for assistance with this article.





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## One More Picture



The 2017 Annual Meeting of Shareholders honored Barbara Hadley Stanton for her service as Chair of the Board, presenting to her this beautiful drawing of the Library by trustee Byron Bell.

## What's Your Favorite Book?

We're collecting members' best-loved titles for a Peluso Family Exhibition Gallery display later this year.

Send your suggestion to [SmallExhibit@nysoclib.org](mailto:SmallExhibit@nysoclib.org) by Monday, August 7 with a sentence or two on why you love it and why it should be better known. The book must be in our collections. Members' names will appear with their submissions. Watch our e-news and website for more on upcoming exhibitions.