The Society Library Index: 2018

2018 was another busy and exciting year at the Society Library. This numbers-based snapshot reveals some recent goings-on.

Years that have passed since the Library’s founding: 264

Years we have been open: 250
(The Library was closed for 14 years during the American Revolution, reopening in 1789)

Years in our current home: 81

Signs throughout the Library to remind our members
No food or beverages—No cell phone calls: 16

Number of libraries in the American Membership Libraries Group: 17

Latest member of the MLG: Folio—The Seattle Athenaeum (founded 2015, admitted in 2018)

New members who joined the Library in 2018: 540

Most impressive use of mobile technology:
Woman heard about the Library while hiking in Alaska and joined online.

Tours of the building: 737

Busiest month for tours: August
Busiest hour for tours overall: 2-3 PM

Active memberships at year’s end: 2,937

Active members for over 25 years: 623

Active members for over 40 years: 208

Longest current membership: 69 years

Books published by members in 2018 (that we are aware of): 26 (by 25 members)*

Books, audiobooks, and ebooks cataloged for the collection in 2018: 4,235

Book donations added to the Library’s collection: 344

Number of books purchased with money from book funds established by Library members: 1,423
Greetings from the Head Librarian

It may be obvious, but we loved capturing the statistics for the Society Library Index. A mix of the serious and silly, it truly encapsulates a year in the life at the Library.

One number stuck out to me, though, because it marks a disquieting trend. Total book checkouts in 2018 were 66,694, representing a decline of 36.7% over the past ten years. This drop in circulations is not unique to our Library, and I’ve read with concern the studies showing that Americans’ time spent reading for pleasure has dropped precipitously in recent years. We are increasingly distracted, interrupted by emails, texts, and notifications on our devices, which impede our ability to pay attention to anything for very long. Reading books is an immersive experience that demands attention. It can be both transporting and enlightening, but apparently many of us are doing much less of it these days.

In 1754, our Library’s founders lamented the lack of a spirit of inquiry in the city and wrote that “scarce one in a thousand is even disposed to talk serious.” To them, opening this Library was a necessary corrective, and as our indomitable Head of Acquisitions, I truly encapsulates a year in the life of the Library.

For more information, click the Electronic Resources tab on our homepage or ask at the Reference Desk.

Electronic Resources

The Library is pleased to announce some exciting new electronic resources.

New titles have been added to RB Digital, our “digital newsstand” allowing members to download magazines. Offerings now include the New Yorker, Condé Nast Traveler, National Geographic, and Vogue, in addition to the magazines previously available such as the New York Review of Books, the Economist, Harper’s, Utne Reader, and more. New issues are added to RB Digital as they are published.

We also recently added The Grove Dictionary of Art to our Oxford Art Online resources. In addition to The Benezit Dictionary of Artists and other Oxford University Press art-reference sources, Library members now have access to Grove’s 40,000 authoritative articles on artists, architects, and more. Content is revised and updated and new articles are added regularly.

Our circulating eBook platform Cloud Library now includes downloadable audiobooks. The growing collection of unabridged audiobooks features classics, recent acclaimed fiction, mysteries, young adult and children’s titles, and more.

And, in case you missed it, as of summer 2018 we also offer the Loeb Classical Library Digital Edition—more than 500 volumes of ancient Latin, Greek, and English texts from Harvard University Press’ acclaimed Loeb Classical Library.

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Total checkouts in 2018
(books, audiobooks, and ebooks): 66,694

Ebook checkouts: 4,941

Average number of checkouts per day: 192

The three most popular books of the year:
- A Gentleman in Moscow by Amor Towles;
- Manhattan Beach by Jennifer Egan;
- Asymmetry by Lisa Halliday

Most popular ebook: Manhattan Beach
by Jennifer Egan

Number of times a book (or ebook) by Georges Simenon was checked out in 2018: 104
...Anthony Trollope: 73
...Donna Leon: 202
...Henry James: 75
...Barbara Pym: 86

Number of ebook checkouts: 70

Number of times a nonfiction book about World War II was checked out: 471

Number of times a book about Donald Trump, or his term as President, was checked out: 232

Books loaned out via interlibrary loans: 345

Books borrowed via interlibrary loan: 297

Researcher visits to the rare book reading room: 33
(22 individual researchers)

Full-text article downloads from JSTOR: 8,608

Members who signed on to begin using Cloud Library, our circulating eBook platform: 181
Digital magazines checked out from RBdigital: 994

Abraham Lincoln biographies in stack 7: 180
Napoleon I biographies: 97

Winston Churchill biographies: 101

Checkouts for A Gentleman in Moscow: 26
Checkouts for Atonement: 23
Checkouts for The Godfather: 21
Checkouts for The Godfather Part II: 19
Checkouts for The Godfather Part III: 17
Checkouts for The Godfather: The Complete Epic Trilogy: 16

Checkouts for the 13 volumes in Jeff Kinney’s Dog Man series: 61
Checkouts for the 4 volumes in Jeff Kinney’s Diary of a Wimpy Kid series: 64
Checkouts for the Guinness Book of World Records: 22

Entries submitted to the 16th annual Young Writers Awards: 268
Young artists using the Children’s Library weekend Creation Station on its opening day in 2018, an unseasonably warm Sunday in January (1/28/18; high temperature of 55): 28
Story and craft programs presented by the children’s librarians: 248

Whitridge Room Happy Hours: 12
New York City-related books recommended by Library members for our On the Town exhibition: 42

Number of readers who recommended Jack Finney’s Time and Again: 11
Rex Stout books recommended: 2
Giant black & white cookies consumed at the exhibition opening: 4

Number of books reviewed by the jury for the New York City Book Awards: 139
Books selected as winners: 6

Followers of our Instagram account as of mid-December: 1,340

Percent increase in Instagram followers during the year: 143

Book recommendations articles published on our website: 11

Blog posts published on our website: 54

People who liked our Instagram post displaying books about Beantown after losing bet with Boston Athenaeum (damn Yankees): 117

Boston Athenaeum members who visited the NYPL this year: 20

Live from the Library evenings since we started inviting readers to read from their own work: 19
Total number of readings: 304
Percentage of member readings considered memoir: 15.7

Number of those described as “memwah”: 1

Prompt workshops in 2018: 11
Average prompts per session: 2.09

Books consulted for Women Get The Vote exhibition: 70
Visitors, not including Library members, who saw The New York World of Willa Cather exhibition (October 2017–August 2018): 1,000

Checkouts for Dav Pilkey’s books (author of Captain Underpants and Dog Man series): 61
Checkouts for the 13 volumes in Jeff Kinney’s Diary of a Wimpy Kid series: 64
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Young artists using the Children’s Library weekend Creation Station on its busiest day in 2018, an unseasonably warm Sunday in January (1/28/18; high temperature of 55): 28
Story and craft programs presented by the children’s librarians: 248
Pounds of candy distributed to trick-or-treaters: 8

*If you are a member and have published in 2018 or are publishing in 2019, let us know!
Votes For Women Broadsides
by Cathy McGowan, Circulation Librarian

In the Library’s Special Collections there is a remarkable group of rarely viewed and yellowing broadsides. Broadsides were thin sheets of paper printed with notices, news, and drawings as an inexpensive way to reach the public, serving as pre-electronic tweets. These Votes for Women Broadsides shed light on the activities of the suffrage movement in the dramatic years leading up to the passage of the 19th Amendment. This dive into women’s history filled me with gratitude for what women did so many years ago for all our rights.

The first issue of Votes for Women Broadside, published by the Women’s Political Union, was dated January 21, 1911, and is part of the Library’s collection along with six other 1911 issues. The dedication on the first front page states, "The Votes for Women Broadside is single in its purpose. Its founders and supporters believe in the enfranchisement of women. They held this belief yesterday, they hold it today, they will hold it until their ideal has become a reality."

Its pages were full of columns that inspired, that were humorous, and that kept readers informed about events related to the cause. An article from February 18 about the inequality of both pay and safety regulations for women closes with the question, "Now how about you? Are you going to settle back and do nothing because you are comfortable, or will you help us win full citizenship for New York State’s 600,000 working women?"

Suffragette humor is on display in The Suffragist’s Scrap-Book section of the January 28 printing in the following:

Anti-suffragist Man Lawyer: "My sense of chivalry rebels when I think of arguing in court against a woman lawyer."

Suffragist: "Does your sense of chivalry rebel when you arrive at your office at 9 a.m. and find a woman on her knees who has been scrubbing the floors since 4 a.m.?"
New Members Party

On December 3, the Library hosted a gathering for members who joined since last June.

Family Fun Day

On February 2 the Library welcomed almost 300 members and visitors to an open house for families. Storyteller Bill Gordh told tales from around the globe in the Members’ Room. Crafting in the Whitridge Room was a popular activity.

Exhibition Opening

Women Get the Vote: a Historic Look at the Nineteenth Amendment opened on January 29 in the Peluso Family Exhibition Gallery. Author and Library member Brooke Kroeger shared her perspective on the women’s suffrage movement.
One More Picture

Ms B reads to a captivated audience during Drag Queen Story Hour, November 2018.