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NEWSLETTER OF THE PROVIDENCE ATHENÆUM

STEPHEN HOPKINS PHILANTHROPIC AWARD

The spirit of Stephen Hopkins is alive in our 2008 Stephen Hopkins Philanthropic Award recipients: Richard and Sheila Congdon. For two decades they have been integral to the library, serving on committees and the Board and helping to raise essential funds for both building projects and operating expenses.

The Congdons were introduced to the Athenaeum via their children, when a neighbor invited them to story time in 1978. From 1980 to 1982 Sheila chaired the Children's Committee, helping to create a fun atmosphere and expose children to the excitement of reading. Between 1999 and 2001 she chaired various efforts within the Special Events Committees for the *Festa Fiorentina*, *April in Paris*, and *Viva España* galas, and in 2002 she and Dick chaired the *Roman Holiday* event.

Dick became chair of the Building and Grounds Committee in 2001 and joined the Board of Directors the following year. His ability to work with funders, contractors, and other agencies enabled us to address the code and structural needs of today while preserving the substance of an old structure, creating and maintaining a lively cultural center. They tell us that "through all of these events, we had the opportunity to work with lots of dedicated folks who share a common interest in good literature and being part of a wonderful cultural and social venue. Being part of these and other committees and events, we are able to give back to such a venerable institution."

The Congdons have also led busy professional and personal lives. Sheila worked as a nurse and vascular technologist, also volunteering over the years for the Red Cross of RI, Genesis Community, St. Francis Chapel health center, and others. Dick's

long engineering career was focused in hospital and corporate settings; he was also active in national organizations devoted to clinical engineering certification. Together they raised two daughters, Dawn B. Lovelace of Riva, MD and Sarah E. Barr of Boston, MA and in retirement are enjoying reading, traveling, and spending time with their grandchildren.



When asked what they love about the Athenaeum, the Congdons answered in their naturally humorous way: "Besides the wine and cheese, it is the people, both staff and members! The staff at the Athenaeum is its most vibrant asset; always pleasant, good humored, and helpful – willing to go the extra mile to find what we are looking for. And the Athenaeum itself creates an environment that is more than just a place where books are stored. Overall, it is a feeling of extended family, which asks us to think differently and to be part of the cultural dialogue." Congratulations and heartfelt thanks to Sheila and Dick!

COUNT DOWN TO A CABINET OF CURIOSITIES – AND AN AWESOME AUCTION!



This year's gala, *A Cabinet of Curiosities*, takes place at the Roger Williams Park Casino on Saturday, April 26th and the goddess Athena wants to know: do you have your tickets yet? Our auction team has collected a trove of treasures, including (but not limited to) a concert by the Providence String Quartet in your home, a walking tour with architectural historian Mack Woodward, a backstage tour of the incomparable John Carter Brown Library with Director Ted Widmer, a cocktail party at the Athenaeum with music by Minor Swing and hors d'oeuvres by Russell Morin, a chance to raid Barrett Bready's extensive wine cellar, a salon in your home organized with the guest of your choice by Christina Bevilacqua, a geological expedition with Terry Tullis, a treasure hunt at the RISD Nature Lab, an antiques shopping spree, and the *pièce de resistance* - a coffee table made from a "re-purposed" antique Athenaeum card catalogue cabinet, and much more. Don't miss this festive evening, our most important fundraising event of the year!

MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT OF THE BOARD:

FINDING THE FOUNTAIN OF YOUTH: Read to a child. For many of us “of a certain age” that daily activity has disappeared. I have had the good fortune to be blessed with three grandsons and to have taken up this activity again after a long absence. What a wonderful experience - like a flower opening slowly. First the cover, talking about the characters depicted, small hands naming each, then the gradual unfolding of the story with growing interest for both of us. The excitement, humor, or mystery continues with explanations from the old and young. And with any luck, “Can we read it again, Grammy?” What an opportunity to again read and reveal so many wonders from *Pat the Bunny* to *Goodnight Moon* to *Art Dog*. From *A Child's Garden of Verses* and *The Story of Ferdinand* to *Olivia*. Everyone has a favorite from then and an opportunity to choose from now, but the book title is almost unimportant. It's the joy of youthful expectation that both the reader and the child take from this experience. If there is no easy access to a grandchild, borrow one from a friend or relative and find a cozy spot to read in the Children's Library at the Athenaeum, or check programs in the area that need readers for children. Just read to a child, and take years off your age!

Alayne Barnicoat



THE OWLET News From The Children's Library

MAY 2008

WEDNESDAY, MAY 7 AT 10am

Squiggles and Giggles

Toddler art classes with seasoned art teacher and mom Kristen Ramsey. Kristen has designed six programs specifically for the very young that will include exposure to the techniques of drawing, collage, printmaking, sculpture, and more!

Wednesday mornings from 5/7 - 6/11

Ages 2-4. Limit 10. R.S.V.P. by April 30

Members \$5 per class, non-members \$10 per class

FRIDAY, MAY 16 AT 5:30pm

Family Movie Night

Walt Disney's *The Sword in the Stone*

The magic of Merlin the wizard and a young King Arthur...

Pizza, juice boxes, and Hoodsie ice cream treats, what could be better?

Ages 5 and up. Limit 15. R.S.V.P.

\$5 snack fee per child (adults free)

WEDNESDAY, MAY 21 AT 4pm

It's a Worm's World! Join the "Worm Ladies" Nancy Warner and Lois Fulton for an afternoon of science fun with worms. Learn how the quiet little worm helps our planet in a very BIG way!

Ages 3 and up with an adult. Limit 12. R.S.V.P.
(NO STORY HOUR)

STORY HOURS

BEAR CUBS - TUESDAY MORNINGS AT 10:30

Songs, rhymes, and clapping games for the very young, infants to age 2.

FAWNS - WEDNESDAY AFTERNOONS AT 4

Stories, songs, and craft activities for children ages 3 - 6.
(NO STORY HOUR 5/21)

CHIPMUNKS - THURSDAY MORNINGS AT 10:30

Songs, rhymes, stories, and craft activities for toddlers 24 to 34 months.

GET READY TO READ!

Book Worm Club and our own Summer Reading program will resume in June!

CAMP THEO

Monday mornings at 10:30 from June 29 - July 27
Ages 3-5 Dates and theme TBA

ALARM ALERT! Please note that the program door in the Reading Room is to be used ONLY during programs. At all other times its alarm is on - and exiting through that door sets off the alarm, causes security havoc, and severely rattles the other patrons and staff!

Please use only the upstairs doors during non-program hours. Thank you!

RISD LIBRARY ALERT! Athenaeum members who use the RISD library are advised that a new policy for computer access in that library is in place. A member of the RISD Circulation Desk staff must log you in to the work station and the time allotted is 30 minutes per session. Sessions may be renewed but the staff member needs to repeat the login for you. Recent and significant security risks have necessitated this procedure for all non-RISD users of that library's computers.

HARD TIMES AND GREAT EXPECTATIONS MESSAGE FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Coffee usually accompanies my morning glance at the headlines, but lately such phrases as “Stocks Plummet”, “Inflationary Pressures Real”, and “Recession At Hand”, make me want to reach instead for Pepto-Bismol. As we each grapple personally with dismal forecasts and the impact a recession could have on our lives, the reality of how the current economic climate affects my own family carries over to my concerns about how it affects the Athenaeum... my other family.

The Providence Athenaeum now stands on solid financial footing, but we are not immune to the economic downturn. Our revenues and ability to meet operating expenses rely on the combined strength of our endowment, membership growth, and fundraising efforts, particularly our Annual Appeal. The amount of available endowment funds (not to exceed 5% of a three year rolling average) is driven by market factors largely beyond our control; remaining income, however, comes from you, members and donors who generously choose to sustain the library through the ever-changing economic environment.

Favorable market conditions over the last two years allowed the endowment to provide not only stable but modestly increasing revenue, but the recent downturn is having the opposite effect. Poor market conditions on one side and inflationary pressure on the other mean that our typically stable endowment income will not grow into the next fiscal year at the same rate as expenses. In this time of weak markets we must rely more heavily on the generosity of our members and donors.

After years of working to secure financial stability we do not want our successes to erode with the markets. So much vitality and goodwill surround the many great things now happening! But ensuring the Athenaeum's continued success remains a delicate balance between addressing immediate short-term critical needs and developing long-term financial capacity. To overcome these challenges we must meet annual operating costs while simultaneously building the endowment.

Despite the “Hard Times” ahead, I embrace the

challenge with “Great Expectations”. We can limit the damage of weak returns by raising more revenue, holding the line on withdrawals, preserving the endowment's principle, and fulfilling our duty

to the many generations that brought us this far. For the long-term future we must develop new donor programs, cultivate planned giving, and broaden fund-raising efforts. Your ideas in these areas are most welcome!

What is it about the Athenaeum that resonates with you? Whether the building, collections, Children's Library, programs, personal service, people, or a bit of each, we hope that the Athenaeum continues to be a meaningful philanthropic priority for you. And now is when YOU can have a long-lasting, meaningful impact as an individual contributor, transforming and accelerating our progress.

We must raise \$25,000 by June 30th to meet our budgeted goal. Your gift to the Annual Appeal provides critical support for the Athenaeum today.... your additional contribution will ensure our tomorrow. Please join us to make this year's Annual Appeal a success. And as always, thank you for your support!



Remember: those who give \$500 to the Annual Appeal between July 1, 2007 and June 30, 2008 will be invited to a special Donor's Reception featuring the Providence String Quartet, to be held September 8th at the Roger Williams Botanical Center.

LEVINS GIVE LOYALLY, LIBERALLY

Longtime members Leonard and Linda Lotridge Levin have made a major gift of \$10,000 in honor of their daughters, who in their early years spent many happy moments at the Athenaeum. The Sara E. Levin and Rachel F. Levin Fund will be used to purchase books on history and biography, mysteries, and children's books. We are deeply grateful to the Levin family for their love and support of the Athenaeum!



NEW DEVELOPMENTS.... IN DEVELOPMENT! From Alison Maxell

Christina Bevilacqua, Director of Member Services and Programs has added a new role, becoming Director of Member Services, Programs, and Development. How can she possibly do this? The more accurate question might be... what took us so long? Perfectly placed in the community and profoundly responsible for our recent growth in membership as well as program sponsorship and attendance, she brings great promise to our development efforts! At her side will be the incomparable team of Kathleen Bower and Sandy Markley, job sharing as administrative anchors to the Member Services, Programs, and Development Office, Monday through Friday. Add to this the unfailing support of the Board, Executive Director, Development Committee, staff, and you, our members - stop by on your next visit and offer your congratulations!

CYCLING AT THE CIRCULATION DESK

Please welcome two new staff members to our Circulation Desk: Alex Hess is a bibliophile and author who lives in Bristol. He has traveled extensively in Southeast Asia and is a scuba-diving and bicycling enthusiast. Amy Lewis is an instructor in English at Rhode Island College who also has manuscripts in progress. The dramatic arts figure in her

repertoire as well, and she is a recipient of a RISCA fellowship in fiction. We are excited and pleased to have Circulation Desk Assistant Jeff Metzler as the newest addition to the Technical Services Office staff! As a library school student at the University of Rhode Island, he will lend us his expertise by taking on the ordering and copy cataloging of new books.

WHAT I'VE BEEN READING by Carol Cook

If you *don't* like caterpillars, read this book; if you *do*, read this book: Kim Todd's *Chrysalis: Maria Sibylla Merian and the Secrets of Metamorphosis*. Todd's kaleidoscopic, eloquent presentation of Merian's life richly details the domestic life and artistic, intellectual, scientific, and religious currents of the 17th century as they influenced Merian. Growing up in a household of artistic and literary activity, she received instruction from two skilled flower painters. Central to her life was her investigation of metamorphosis, the life cycle of insects and amphibians as they were transformed through the stages of egg, larva, pupa, cocoon, and finally adult – "A plague of caterpillars into a blessing of butterflies."

Unlike her contemporaries, "natural philosophers" who studied their dissected specimens through Leeuwenhoek's microscope, Merian observed her creatures and the plants they fed on in their natural habitat wherever she lived - her native Frankfurt, Nuremberg, Amsterdam, or the Friesland village of Wiewert, to which an ascetic "cult" of Labadists had attracted her. It might be said that for her "metamorphosis in nature symbolized transformation in the spiritual life."

Especially intriguing is Todd's account of probably the most difficult but most rewarding time in Merian's life – her investigative sojourn in sweltering Surinam, one of the richest sources of insects in the world. In 1699, at 52, apparently not unhappy to be away from her husband, she and her daughter undertook the several-months journey to South America, where even the teeming-with-life canopies of trees did not escape her recorded observations. She relied for help collecting specimens on the Amerindians (later



in 1679, 1683, and 1717, the last shortly before her death.

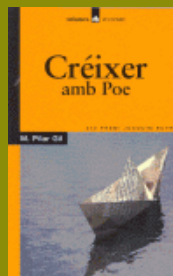
Todd's prodigious research results in an exciting model, combining scholarship with narrative flair. Her detailed review of Merian's life exposes the reader, as Merian was exposed, to the issues of the time – theological views of metamorphosis, scientific controversies, opinions on slavery, and even on abortion (using herbs). Merian was an exceptional woman among other exceptional women, whom we also meet, adding another dimension to this fine tale.

The text is enhanced by handsome illustrations of Merian's drawings and water colors, a welcome bibliography of the author's sources, a list of Merian's letters consulted, and one of facsimiles of her work.

Carol Cook was a founding member of the Philbrick Committee and currently serves on the Collections Committee. On behalf of the Athenaeum she authored *Travel and Exploration: A Catalogue of the Providence Athenaeum Collection* in 1988 and, with Marguerite Dorian, *The Natural History Collection of the Providence Athenaeum: A Selected Bibliography* in 1997.

BOOKISH TYPES: Congratulations to two authors among our membership who have new and heralded publications:

Linda Lotridge Levin's *The Making of FDR: The Story of Stephen T. Early, America's First Modern Press Secretary* introduces us to a pioneering figure in the field of political image-making – could any subject be more timely? In addition to being an author of several books and an Athenaeum member and major donor, Linda is professor and chair of the Journalism Department at URI.



M. Pilar Gil's new novel, *Crèixer amb Poe*, written in Catalan, is inspired in part by Poe's only novel, *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym* – just as we promised, it's still wildly influential! In Pilar's novel, one character works at the Athenaeum and another uses it for research. Naturally, we cannot wait for the translation into English – stay tuned!



RAISE YOUR GLASS!

In his recent New York Times story "Where Greek Ideals Meet New England Charm" (3/7/08) on New England Athenaeums, author Roger Mummert noted our popular Salons and quoted Alison, "We're scouring antique stores for more sherry glasses." Suddenly parcels arrived from all over the U.S.A. – from generous readers! We have received four collections of charming vintage glassware, and could not be more delighted to add these treasures to our sherry table – come by soon to toast our new arrivals! Many thanks to our thoughtful donors: Sheila and Dick Congdon (Rhode Island), Mrs. Robert H. Janover (Michigan), Mrs. Nello Pace (California), and Rosemary Loudon (Connecticut).

