

## THE SALEM ATHENÆUM

337 Essex Street, Salem MA 01970

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Web Site: www.salemathenaeum.net



Founded 1760

## LIBRARY HOURS:

Tues. / Wed. / Fri: 1 PM to 5 PM

Thursday: 5 PM to 9 PM

Saturday: 10 AM to 2 PM

DIRECTOR: Jean Marie Prociou

## THE SALEM ATHENÆUM NEWSLETTER

SPRING 2007

### SAVE THESE DATES

**Scrabble Games** - Thursday  
evenings, 7-9 PM

**May 6 - Bentley Lecture - Kevin Phillips** on American Theocracy in the 21st Century, 4 PM

**May 22 - Lynda Yankaskas** on the History of the Social Library

**May 23 - Annual Meeting**  
7:00 PM

**June 3 - Garden Party** on Sunday,  
4 to 7 PM

**June 9 - Annual Book Sale**

### Summer Salons

**June 15 - Paul and Lynda Hare**, will discuss their experience in Cuba.

**June 22 - Jim McAllister** - Stories of the Athenæum's Neighborhood

**June 29 - Hale Bradt** - Book on Far East During WWII

**July 6 - Dale Gephardt** on his trips down the Amazon

**July 13 - Janet Barnes** on the Irish writers, Somerville and Ross

**July 20 - Anne Bromer** lecture on miniature books

**July 27 - Dick Scott & Octavia Randolph** on historical fiction

**August 3 Julie and Tim Lufts** will talk about their recent trip to China.

# Athenæum Programs Get Better and Better



SUE WEAVER SCHOPF

### Parker String Quartet

The programs for the 2006-07 season have brought many unexpected surprises and new audience members to the Athenæum, beginning in September with Kelly Tyler-Lewis' exciting account of the research and travel connected with her book, *The Lost Men: The Harrowing Story of Shackleton's Ross Sea Party*, which she delivered to a standing-room-only crowd. Emily Murphy followed last year's popular lecture on the Derby family with another, this time on the activities of Richard Junior's sister, Martha, a Loyalist who fled with her husband, John Prince, to Halifax, Nova Scotia in 1774.

Our first-ever indoor musical event, held in October in honor of Mozart's 250th birth-

day, was likewise a sell-out, when the talented young Parker String Quartet performed a trio of compositions by Mozart and Haydn before a spellbound audience amid the beauty of a candlelit Athenæum. The musicians praised the building's acoustics and expressed delight at having the audience members so close to them as they performed. Many of those present urged us to consider offering a concert series at the Athenæum, so perfectly suited is the building to an intimate evening of music.

Robert Scanlan, drama instructor and internationally-recognized director of the plays of Samuel Beckett, surprised his

Continued on page 5

## FROM THE PRESIDENT, BOARD OF TRUSTEES

Over the long course of its colorful history, the Athenæum has meant many things to many people. But it has never been more important than it is today. With the relentless erosion of America's sense of community, so vividly outlined in Robert Putnam's book *Bowling, Alone*, social and cultural strongholds like the Athenæum are more vital, more needed, more precious, than ever.

That the Athenæum not only remains, but flourishes, should be a source of pride for all of our members and friends. Packed houses at lectures, enthusiastic classes, exuberant discussion groups, obstreperous Scrabblers, the spontaneous formation of Chinese and Spanish language groups, all lend support to fellow board member Dick Jendrysik's recent wry remark that "Not all great Athenæum members are dead!"

No, they certainly aren't, as evidenced by every gathering we have. Though many of us take pleasure in having access to the Athenæum's seductive and inspiring collection of books, and even more of us enjoy the amazing array of programs of all kinds, I expect most of us agree that the real value of the Athenæum is inseparable from the people we meet there, and the friendships we form. This summer we'll offer more opportunities to socialize and talk among our members and friends of the Athenæum, and we hope you'll take advantage of it. Come and meet your fellow members, and revel in the fact that

not all the Athenæum's riches are found between covers.

Thanks primarily to Sue Schopf, who is our very own embodiment of civilization and joy, much as Athena was for our founders, the quality of our programs is, and will continue to be, superb. Her outline of upcoming programs printed elsewhere in this newsletter will surprise and delight all of you.

This month, for Julie Lutts and me, marks the conclusion of our terms on the Athenæum Board. For both of us, working on the Athenæum's behalf has been a pleasure. We have watched our membership grow exponentially not only in numbers but in loyalty as well. We have seen the Athenæum's continued rejuvenation, traceable over many years, in classes and lectures, musical evenings, and exhibits such as the "Art of the Book Cover" and "What They Were Reading" conceived and created by Elaine von Bruns and Winifred Wilkins. A volunteer base under the tutelage of Francie King has blossomed, providing a much needed broader sharing of tasks.

The board we leave is composed of engaged, skilled and committed people, unafraid to confront the challenges that face us. I am proud to have served with them, and gratified that, having known not a single one of them at the beginning of my board service, I now count each of them a friend. Thank you all.

—Francis Mayo

### **From seven 'till nine on Thursday night the Scrabble players of Salem go out to fight a deadly battle using words "zori" and "qat" to decide who is victor and who is not**

When I started to come to Scrabble night I was a novice. I barely knew how to play. But, over time, I became better. The group is friendly, allowing the use of a Scrabble dictionary and several "cheat sheets," which include my personal favorite, the two letter word sheet which is full of words like ka, za, xi, and qi. I swear these words were made for Scrabble.

In our group, you will find a pack of extraordinary people. One is a professor at Dartmouth, one has traveled the world, one has had four or five bingos in one game, and one is impossible to beat. That is my main attraction to the group, not only to play and learn Scrabble, but to learn from the amazing people there. I learn more and more each time I go.

So, if you've never played Scrabble or if you live and breathe Scrabble, come join us Thursday night from 7 to 9. Usually we play two games.

P.S. "Qat" is pronounced "caught" and is a type of tree, just so you know.

—Stash Usovicz

### **First Chinese Language Course Completed**

The students in Benjamin Wang's class in basic Mandarin regret that their ten classes ended on January 28th. The students had a good time and learned a lot about contemporary Chinese life, as well as spoken and written language for everyday situations. An extra highlight was a Chinese dinner at the Su Chang Restaurant in Peabody on January 21. Spouses attended; and Mr. Wang's wife and young son helped select a delicious array of dishes.

### **Class in Basic Chinese (Mandarin)**

After a very successful class last fall/winter, The Athenæum has decided to continue this language program with another class for beginners. It will start in September and last for 10 weeks, like the first course. Benjamin Yong Wang of the Salem Oriental Gallery on Essex Street will teach the course. Class time Saturdays 10-12 or weekday evening. More information: Jean Marie Prociou at (978) 744-2540 or call Nancy TenBroeck at (978) 741-2742.

# Board will launch fundraising effort

In an effort to shore up the financial future of the Salem Athenæum, the Library's Board of Trustees will launch a multipronged development program over the next six months, including grant-writing, corporate and personal solicitation, and additional long-range financial planning. The plans follow the Library's months-long examination of its internal organization, resulting in a new strategic plan.

This is the Athenæum's first entry into organized fundraising. Said Francis Mayo, outgoing President of the Board, "The Library for many decades has depended on its endowment, and this has been sufficient. Now, given the condition of our collection--greatly in need of conservation--and the need to maintain our historic building, we must reach out into the community for support. As with development efforts in most worthy nonprofit institutions, ours will require commitment and hard work."

Mayo also noted that the success of this year's heavily-attended Library programs organized by the Programs Committee headed by Trustee Sue Schopf constituted a further mandate to begin a fundraising effort. "We've attracted new members through the programs," he said, "and in order to continue attracting

top-notch lecturers and performers, we will need to assure their support over the long term." The Athenæum will seek underwriting for its rich variety of lectures, musical performances, and other activities, most offered at modest prices.

Mayo said that the Athenæum would have the added challenge of conducting the fundraising effort primarily through volunteer assistance. To that end, he said the Board will assemble a team that will begin meeting over the summer.

The tasks immediately at hand will be the development of a case statement detailing the current finances of the Library and describing its most immediate needs. The Board will reach into its own membership for development experience and consultation on best practices.

As the Library's development plan unfolds, members will be kept informed and invited into the process. Details will emerge over the summer months and be reported in the Fall newsletter.

If you are interested in the Library's development activities and want to be involved in their planning, kindly contact Francie King, Trustee, at 781-631-5967.

—Francie King

## SPRING CLEANING

The annual spring clean-up in the Athenæum Gardens is now scheduled for May 5 (Saturday) at 9:00 AM. The morning will be devoted to sprucing up the gardens in front and back of the building. Minor plants will be moved, bushes will be pruned, leaves raked, gutters cleared, lawn furniture cleaned, sidewalk swept and edged, and the annual repair to the light fixture accomplished. All the chores of a proper spring clean-up will be accomplished in one very busy day.

Last year more than twenty volunteers participated in making a real difference to the appearance of the grounds, and we are hoping for a similar turn-out from the membership this year. Volunteers should bring work gloves, tools and enthusiasm. The Athenæum will provide trash bags, wheelbarrows, refreshments and lunch.

Rain date is May 12, (Saturday.) in the afternoon at 2:00 PM.

# Maule's well, maybe

Last year, during the Spring clean-up, a sinkhole was found near the south-east corner of the building. On inspection we discovered that the sinkhole was in fact an abandoned stone well believed to date from the late 17th century.

During the past year, preliminary investigations of the site were done by Dr. Tad Baker of Salem State College. Further research was done by the grounds committee to establish the successive ownership of the property. Public records from the 17th century do not indicate the existence or location of wells in general, so it is not possible to precisely date the well.

Based on the remarkable stonework in the interior of the well, the construction is believed to date from the 17th century, when the property was owned by the

prominent Quaker, Thomas Maule. The property remained in the family, and the Maule House was a landmark on Essex Street until it was demolished in the mid-19th century.

The Athenæum building, erected in 1907, passes within six feet of the well. Remarkably, the foundation construction apparently did not disturb the well.

In accordance with the requirements for safety, and regulation of the Massachusetts Historical Commission, the well has been lined and filled with stone to maintain the safety of the grounds, and continued integrity of the interior stonework. The site will be registered with the Massachusetts Historical Commission.

—Richard Jendrysik



**Well before filling**



**After filling**

RICHARD JENDRYSIK

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## VANDALS, AGAIN

Security issues continue to plague the Athenæum. Last month, another downspout was stolen off the south side of the building. The Salem Police report that this type of theft is not uncommon in Salem, where building fixtures are being stolen for the value of the metal. Our downspouts are copper.

The theft was preceded by apparent vandalism to the one light fixture in back of the building. A similar pattern occurred last spring, when two downspouts disappeared following vandalism to the same light fixture.

To prevent water damage to the building, the downspouts need to be repaired. For the long term, building lighting has to be enhanced to provide better security to the grounds.



## Athenæum Programs continued from page 5

The spring course, "Masterpieces of Modern Irish Literature," which I had the pleasure of teaching, drew 25 participants and proved to be the second "bookend" of a year's study of the impact of British colonialism on art and literature. Readings included the poetry of Thomas Moore, James Clarence Mangan, William Butler Yeats, and Seamus Heaney; the fiction of Somerville & Ross, James Joyce, and William Trevor; and the plays of John Millington Synge, Brendan Behan, Brian Friel, and Martin McDonagh; but these works were read against the background of Irish history and the painful story of nearly 800 years of British rule. Every week, the class crackled with excitement. Not only did everyone have a great deal to say about the works we were reading, but people brought their personal family histories to the class, their own recollections of growing up in Ireland, or the versions of Ireland's past that had been transmitted to them in school or by friends and family. At the suggestion of Fran Mayo, we instituted an online discussion group, which continued through the weeks of the course-and continues to this day. And we viewed films on Irish themes-the BBC's "The Real Charlotte" and Neil Jordan's "Michael Collins"-all of which further brought the history and literature to life. Through one of our classmates, Ziggy Hartfelder, a St. Patrick's Day musical event was brought to the Athenæum. On the final night of the course, Jack Mullin, another of the participants, brought his bagpipes to class and played a superb selection of tunes for us. It was a grand conclusion to a rich 10-week experience, which we were all a little sad to see end. Perhaps the only disappointment of the year was the planned Athenæum-sponsored trip to Ireland, which regrettably did not draw enough sign-ups to

make the group package possible. Those who did sign up, most of whom were from the Irish lit course, expressed the hope that we would try again in the future to design and offer a trip just for Athenæum members. So try again we will.

In mid-April, the brilliant and witty Nathaniel Philbrick delivered the Adams lecture to an audience of 200 at Hamilton Hall. Provoking many personal remembrances of how we, as young students, first learned about the *Mayflower*, "the Pilgrims," and the first Thanksgiving, Philbrick described how the myths of America's founding often suppress key events such as the highly unromantic episode known as King Phillip's War.

With the Bentley lecture by former Washington insider Kevin Phillips coming up on Sunday, May 6, some major events of the season still lie ahead. We also have National Poetry Month to celebrate in April with our annual community read-in on Saturday, April 28, as well as the talk by Lynda Yankaskas on May 22 about the history of membership libraries. But already we are making plans for the coming year when we will celebrate the 100th anniversary of our building. In addition to events connected with the anniversary, we will have more concerts; three new courses (on Modernism in Literature and the Arts, The American Revolution, and World War II in History and Film); and another set of first-rate speakers drawn from the creative arts, science, and history. As always, we welcome your suggestions for ways in which we can make our programming still more attractive and continue to bring new constituencies into the growing Athenæum family.

*Sue Weaver Schopf*

## Summer Salons

Join us for a series of Summer Salons this summer on Friday evenings between 5:00 and 6:30 PM, beginning in June. These casual evenings, many of which we hope to hold in our beautiful garden, are meant to be informal gatherings to allow us to hear from members and friends of the Athenæum who have interests or experiences they are willing to share. Bring a picnic, if you like!

**June 15** **Paul and Lynda Hare**, Great Britain's former ambassador to Cuba and his wife will discuss their experiences of life and politics in Cuba.

**June 22** Salem's favorite lecturer, **Jim McAllister**, will talk with us about "Interesting stories of the Athenæum's neighborhood."

**June 29** **Hale Bradt** will tell us about the book he has written about his father's experiences in the Far East during World War II, and his family life following his father's return.

**July 6** **Dale Gephardt** will tell us of his passion for botany, and of his trips down the Amazon.

**July 13** ALM candidate **Janet Barnes** will talk with us about the wonderful Irish women, Somerville and Ross, who wrote the ever popular Irish RM stories and several Irish Big House novels.

**July 20** **Anne Bromer** will lecture and show us

slides on the topic of miniature books. She'll also tell us about her book on the subject, which will be available for purchase and signing.

**July 27** **Dick Scott and Octavia Randolph** will discuss their interest in historical fiction. Bring a favorite book or two from this genre, to recommend to the group.

**August 3** **Julie and Tim Lutts** will talk about their recent trip to China.

We hope you will have suggestions for other topics and presenters. Please feel free to call us!

**Note:** All of these speakers are graciously donating their time, and some may have work commitments that require last minute schedule changes. Check our Web site for any revisions. Other than this newsletter and our Web site, these events will not be advertised. So save this notice!

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Attitude is a little thing that makes a big difference.  
*Winston Churchill*

**“Hear ye, hear ye...” The Annual Meeting of the Proprietors of the Salem Athenæum will be called to order at 7:00 pm on Wednesday, May 23, 2007 in the library. All proprietors and members of the Athenæum are most cordially invited to attend. We have exciting information and reports to present and always welcome your questions, input and feedback. Additionally, proprietors will be asked to vote on the nominating committee's candidates for Trustees to lead our unique and blossoming institution, and to act upon such other matters as may properly come before the meeting.**

## The Salem Athenæum

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Salem, MA 01970

