I have always imagined that Paradise will be a kind of library.”

Jorge Luis Borges
THE CATHEDRAL OF BOOKS
The George Peabody Library was part of the original Peabody Institute, founded in 1857, which also included a lecture series, a conservatory of music, and an art collection. The library remained part of the Peabody Institute until 1966 when the library collection was transferred to the City of Baltimore and administered as a department of the Enoch Pratt Free Library. The collection was transferred again in 1982, this time to Johns Hopkins University. Maintaining the provisions of Mr. Peabody’s original gift, the George Peabody Library is a non-circulating collection open to the general public. The library is one of the five Sheridan Libraries and is administered by our Department of Special Collections.

Designed by renowned architect Edmund Lind and routinely honored among the world’s most beautiful libraries, the “cathedral of books” is as rich in scholarly resources as it is visually inspiring. The 300,000-volume collection, begun in 1857, was designed to represent the best and latest of literature in all branches of knowledge with the exceptions of law and medicine. As such, the library offers a window into the scholarly interests of the 19th century, with particular strengths in archaeology, British art and architecture, British and American history, biography, English and American literature, Romance languages and literature, Greek and Latin classics, history of science, geography, and exploration and travel, including a large map collection.

And yet the library remains something of a hidden treasure, even for many in the Hopkins community. We seek to restore the George Peabody Library to the active research library its founder and namesake imagined.

REALIZING THE PEABODY LIBRARY’S POTENTIAL
A full-time, dedicated librarian is essential for building the collections, promoting teaching and research opportunities, and developing classes and exhibitions. In addition, we seek funds for cataloging those rare materials that are not currently accessible through our online database and for conserving the many items in our collection that are in need of care.

A Dedicated Named Librarian for the George Peabody Library

$2,000,000

The librarian’s primary responsibilities will be to manage the George Peabody Library collections, including those connecting to the larger university libraries collections; identify and promote teaching opportunities with the collection to faculty and students across Johns Hopkins and other area institutions; develop specific classes, exhibitions, and programs that are tied to the library; and build community, regional, national, and international recognition for the library.

In addition, the librarian will develop programs to help fully realize the Peabody as a center for 19th century thought and studies. Specific programs could include reinstituting the Peabody Lecture Series, creating post-doctoral fellowships in 19th-century studies, and developing teaching fellowships for graduate students in the humanities. Having a librarian with a vision that extends across and beyond Johns Hopkins will bring the library the greater use it rightly deserves.

Conservation of the George Peabody Collections

$1,500,000

Many of the rare books in the Peabody collection are in desperate need of conservation, requiring the attention of a full-time, named conservator assigned to the Peabody Library.

Cataloging and Online Access for the George Peabody Library Collections

$350,000

While much of the George Peabody Collection is cataloged and accessible online, a significant number of rare books remain uncataloged and inaccessible online. A one-year project to complete this work will cost approximately $200,000. This includes funding for two full-time catalogers and support of library assistants. In addition, the Thompson Mencken collection can be fully cataloged for approximately $150,000.

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