

“It still comes back to me...this is the three-month anniversary of the fire. I keep seeing it.” — a Georgetown librarian

“Mommy, did I do anything wrong to make the library burn down?”  
— a regular attendee of the children’s story time

The Georgetown Recovery and Restoration Fund is administered by the District of Columbia Public Library Foundation. Visit us on the web at: [www.dcpfoundation.org](http://www.dcpfoundation.org)

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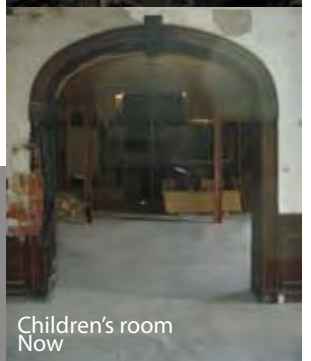
Summer 2007

## “Insider Update”

Georgetown Recovery and Restoration Fund



Children's room  
Before



Children's room  
Now

The weather vane sits, charred and warped, in a display cabinet in the Washingtoniana Room at the Martin Luther King, Jr. Memorial Library. Until April 30, 2007 it sat atop the Georgetown Neighborhood Library – an oil lamp representing “the lamp of learning” on a hill in Washington’s historic neighborhood. Now it is part of an exhibit entitled “Saved from the Fire.”

On April 30, the Georgetown Neighborhood Library suffered a three-alarm fire that destroyed the roof and much of the second floor – particularly the Children’s Room, which has been completely destroyed and the Peabody Room, which sustained serious damage to its historic collection of documents, art, and furniture.

As someone committed to the restoration of this library, the DC Public Library Foundation is providing this “Insider Update.” Thank you so much for your support of the **Georgetown Library Recovery and Restoration Fund** and your commitment to bringing back this neighborhood gem.

### How Bad is It and What Happens Now?

Many levels of assessment and stabilization are currently occurring: assessments of the structure, collections, furnishings, and historic restorations needed for the Peabody Room.

Minkoff Company, Inc. has stabilized the building, removed extensive fire debris, and constructed a temporary roof using wooden trusses and asphalt composite shingles. The temporary roof has a shallower pitch than the original roof and no dormer windows, which explains the difference in appearance. This roof is necessary in order to conduct the drying process. The process involves pumping dry, 115-degree air into the building to remove any remaining moisture from the interior. Before beginning the drying process, the contractor removed furniture, built-in woodwork, and decorative plaster artifacts original to the building. These samples will be used as templates to replicate original aspects of the interior such as crown moldings, columns, column heads and plaster decoration.

Minkoff has also constructed scaffolding around the perimeter of the building to repair cornice and brick sections. These repairs are almost complete.

Right now the structure is stabilized, dry, and empty. Even paint has been removed to facilitate the drying process. It is surprisingly clean, though ghostly in its emptiness.

The intent of the building restoration is to recreate the original look as much as possible. Builders will be able to replicate the roof, cornices, slate, dormers, tower – even the weather vane. Likewise, interior moldings, columns and décor can be replicated thanks to staff and contractors who have done everything possible to preserve what we have and rescue artifacts in order to replicate the library for the future.



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## What about the Peabody Room?

The Peabody Room presents a special challenge as it requires three separate kinds of restoration activity: documents and photos, artwork, and furniture. There is good news and bad news – while almost 90% of the collection was pulled from the building it is still unclear how much can be fully restored.

Paintings, maps, photographs, and plat books were given to Page Conservation and the Smithsonian Institution Libraries for assessment. Five paper-based plat books were sent to the Smithsonian Institution Libraries' Book Conservation Laboratory for vacuum drying. Page Conservation is preparing a detailed plan for restoration of paintings and prints with associated costs for each artwork. Once costs are established, **donors will have the opportunity to “adopt a painting or artifact” and contribute directly to its conservation for the Peabody Room.**

**A story of a painting...**One painting was found largely intact, except for a tear in the canvas. As it turns out, the artist lives nearby and, after the tear is mended, the artist will “fill in” his own work and return the painting to its original state.

The bulk of wet books and materials have been vacuum dried at Belfor Property Restoration in Fort Worth, Texas and are currently housed there awaiting assessment and return to Washington. These documents were saved from developing mold because they were placed in a freezer truck within 48 hours of becoming wet. Without such quick action, all would have been lost.

## How Do you Save an Historic Document?

Wet documents can be fully restored through a process of freezing and vacuum drying. Documents must be “flash frozen” within 48 hours of becoming wet. This is usually done in special trucks which then transport the documents to a vacuum drying facility. Frozen blocks of documents are placed in a vacuum chamber. As the pressure drops, water in a frozen state will sublime to a gas, allowing the documents to move directly from a frozen to dry state. One can even see vapors rising from the blocks of documents. After a few days, documents can be separated and triaged for damage and restoration

Thanks to generous donations to the Georgetown Recovery and Restoration Fund, the DC Public Library Foundation is funding two archive librarians to travel to Texas on August 30th to assess the state of damage and restoration needs. Of particular concern are photos (which can become stuck together) and original newspaper clippings (which can dissolve or suffer from ink bleeding).

**Thanks to your contributions, Peabody documents will be returning to DC and entering the restoration phase sooner than would otherwise have occurred.**

Returned Peabody items will be housed in the Washingtoniana Division in the MLK Jr. Memorial Library. Limited public access will be available while the Collection is being restored.

Furniture is another matter. Most of the Peabody Room furniture dates to 1935 and is made of mahogany. A strange thing happens in a fire: the heat melts varnish or protective coatings and smoke and ash adhere to them, creating white, ghostly surfaces. **These can be restored, though we will need private donations to bring back the original Peabody Room furnishings.**

Many thanks are due to the Smithsonian Institution Libraries and the Washington Conservation Guild who have given countless hours of time, expertise and materials during this time of crisis.

## Is the Children’s Room really gone?

Yes, it is. The Children’s Room suffered the most severe damage of the library. It was completely destroyed and, at one point, stood charred and open to the sky. The entire room must be rebuilt and collection replaced.

Community members are making efforts to continue story time and toddler time, hallmarks of generations of childhood at the Georgetown Library. Librarians are conducting toddler and school-aged children story times throughout the summer at Engine 20, located at 4300 Wisconsin Avenue, NW.

## How much will it cost?

As the assessment is still ongoing, the library is unable to place a specific dollar figure on the full cost of rebuilding and restoration at this time, though it will be significant.

**What is clear is that not all costs will be covered by local government funds – you are needed. The most critical areas include: restoration of historical documents, artwork, and furnishings and enhancements to create a library better than before.**

## Children Help Out too...

Many thanks to our youngest residents who are helping support the Georgetown Library:

- Seven year old Nikolas von Klaudy has donated proceeds from his lemonade stand
- Students at Stoddert Elementary School held a hula-hoop competition and raised \$100
- Even 2 year old Lucy joined her mom, Anna Fuhrman, in selling Georgetown T-shirts at the American Library Association Convention Exhibition Hall

## What’s Next...?

**Bookmobile:** D.C. Public Library has opened a 40-foot bookmobile, open 7 days a week, in the parking lot of the Jelleff Boys and Girls Club, located at 3265 S Street, NW. It contains public computers, Internet access, a modest assortment of books and media, and children’s programs both on and outside the bookmobile.

**Interim Space:** Library officials are currently searching for space to house an interim library while the permanent library is being constructed. It is proving to be challenging to locate 3-5,000 square feet of ground level space, suitable for a library, and close to the original location. Six-eight sites have been investigated but proved to lack key elements. The search continues...

**Purchase Georgetown Recovery Fund T-Shirts:** Many thanks to Anna Fuhrman, owner of the Proper Topper, who has designed a witty T-shirt of the well-known children’s book character, Harold, using his purple crayon to draw the library back to life. T-shirts can be purchased at Proper Topper locations (in Georgetown or Dupont Circle) or online at: [www.properopper.com](http://www.properopper.com).

## Thank you...

for your continued support for this critical effort. Your kindness will allow us to speed up the restoration effort and, ultimately, to create an even greater Georgetown Neighborhood Library.

For further information, please contact: Anna Velazco, Executive Director, at: 202.727.4943 and stay tuned for the next “Insider Update.”