



THE BOSTON ATHENÆUM

News Release

Contact: Peter Walsh, 617-894-1170; walsh@bostonathenaeum.org

For Immediate Release

JAMES REID-CUNNINGHAM APPOINTED TO NEW POSITION OF ASSOCIATE DIRECTOR FOR DIGITAL PROGRAMS AND PRESERVATION AT THE BOSTON ATHENÆUM

(Boston, Massachusetts, April 28, 2011): James Reid-Cunningham, the Boston Athenæum's chief conservator since 2003, has been appointed to the newly-created position of associate director for digital programs and preservation, the Athenæum announced today.

Reid-Cunningham's experience includes more than twenty-five years as a rare book conservator at the Athenæum and at Harvard University, extensive graduate-level teaching, and scholarship in rare books and book conservation. At the Athenæum, he currently supervises the conservation laboratory and its staff, oversees the preservation of a collection of over 600,000 volumes, and manages the library's digital assets initiative.

“This appointment is in recognition of two things,” said Paula Matthews, Stanford Calderwood Director and Librarian. “The first is the now central role of digital and other new technologies in the entire spectrum of the preservation and cataloguing of rare books and other original works. Each link in this chain is essential to making primary material accessible to the wider world of study, scholarship, and public understanding and appreciation.

“At the same time, we also recognize Jim’s extensive involvement in and contributions to the conservation profession and to the advancement of libraries and the book arts around the world. Jim and his new job represent a wonderful synthesis of the history of the book and contemporary trends in libraries.”

“I am delighted to be taking on this new responsibility to design and oversee the Athenæum’s long-term plans in digitization and preservation,” said Reid-Cunningham. “It will enhance our current conservation and digitization programs, and is an acknowledgement of the increasingly key role that digitization and conservation play in every library and museum.

“My specific role will be to create integrated programs assuring that conservation, cataloguing, and digitization occur seamlessly, with the goal of making our collections -- which include rare books, manuscripts, paintings, sculpture, drawings, prints, photographs, contemporary artists’ books, and maps-- more readily available to scholars worldwide.”

About James Reid-Cunningham:

Reid-Cunningham holds a Bachelor of Arts in Humanities from Johns Hopkins University, a Master of Arts in Fine Arts from Tufts University, and a Certificate in Bookbinding from Boston's famed North Bennet Street School. He is an adjunct lecturer on book conservation in the art conservation department, Buffalo State College, NY, one of only three graduate level training programs in the conservation of cultural materials in the United States. He has taught workshops and seminars on bookbinding, book conservation, and related subjects at many venues including the North Bennet Street School, the San Francisco Center for the Book, the Weissman Preservation Center at Harvard University, the Portland Northwest College of Art, Dartmouth College, and the School of Information at the University of Texas.

His artistic bindings and book art have been exhibited internationally and are represented in such varied collections as the Biblioteca Alexandrina in Alexandria, Egypt, the Grolier Club, the Morgan Library and Museum in New York, and the Library of Congress, among others. He is a past president of the Guild of Book Workers and is a professional associate of the American Institute for Conservation of Historic and Artistic Works. He received the Distinguished Alumni Award of the North Bennet Street School in 2006.

About the Boston Athenæum:

Founded in 1807, the Boston Athenæum is Boston's first cultural institution. It combines an art museum, with a public exhibition gallery and collections of paintings, sculpture, prints, drawings, photographs, and decorative arts; a leading research and membership library; and a civic forum including lectures, readings, panel discussions, and other events. An innovator and catalyst for more than two centuries, the Athenæum was one of the three founders of the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, and the inspiration for the Boston Public Library, the first municipally supported library in North America.

The Athenæum's overseers and members have included some of America's greatest literary figures, among them Herman Melville, Henry David Thoreau, Amy Lowell, and Nathaniel Hawthorne, and such leading politicians as Presidents John Quincy Adams and John Fitzgerald Kennedy and Senator Edward M. Kennedy. The Athenæum's National Historic Landmark building on Boston's Beacon Hill houses collections of international importance, among them about half of the library of President George Washington. It holds public exhibitions and events around the year.

- *End* -