

Friends of
BALTIMORE COUNTY PUBLIC LIBRARY
TOWSON BRANCH

October 2026 NEWSLETTER



Pratt tour had us looking up!

By Jan Davies

Why would a Pratt librarian need a steady supply of red nail polish? And why didn't the manager of the Special Collections department wear gloves while handling the fragile material? These questions and more were answered during the Friends' tour of the Enoch Pratt Central Branch on Sept. 15.

Our 15-member group was led through the gorgeously renovated structure by manager John Damond. He shared that the first Central library was located on Mulberry Street when Mr. Enoch Pratt, wealthy Baltimore businessman, donated

just over \$1 million in 1882 (equivalent to \$33.4 million today) to establish a free library open to all. The current block-long structure was built in the early 1930's when they outgrew the original building. Throughout the tour, we were instructed frequently to look up. The ceilings are stunning, but especially in the Video/DVD/Movie room. The lighting fixtures were replaced in the recent renovations to replicate the original lights.

Next, in the Special Collections room we saw a typewriter used by H.L. Mencken. An original copy of James Joyce's *Ulysses* with illustrations by artist Henri Matisse was also donated by Mencken. And Edgar Allan Poe was featured in this room, including locks of his and his wife's hair framed in a small picture frame. While handling the rare volumes, manager Eben Dennis explained that clean, dry hands were preferable to gloves. Cloth gloves need to be laundered and may contain detergent residue, which in turn could harm the books. In the Maryland Collection, manager Caprice Di Liello invited us to explore maps, photos, books on genealogy and old high school yearbooks going back as far as the late 1800's.

After a quick trip through the children's section, John led us down into "the Stacks," where over 1.75 million books are stored below the main level of the library. I believe this was everyone's favorite stop on the tour as most visitors don't get to see the enormity of all of the volumes the Pratt has. That's where the question about red nail



polish was answered. To differentiate the books stored in the stacks from those that remain on the main floor,



many years ago a creative librarian decided to mark the stack books with something that would last a long time and stand out on the label, hence red nail polish! The 1 ½ hours we spent visiting the Pratt was so inspirational and educational.

Even though many of us had been there before, our knowledgeable tour guide and department managers shared information new to us. Watch for news of future tours to other local libraries so you can join us next time!

NEWS AND NOTES:

- **We are accepting donations for the 2027 Book Sale, coming in April! Please bring nearly new books to the information desk during regular library hours (Monday-Thursday 9-8; Friday-Saturday 9-5, Sunday 1-5). Like-new hardbacks with dust jackets, plus children's books in great condition, are in demand.**
- We always need volunteers to help at the Book Sale, especially to do heavy lifting on the set-up days, Monday and Tuesday. On sale days – Wednesday, Thursday, Friday and Saturday – volunteers organize books and assist patrons. To volunteer, email Pat Fraher at themselves@comcast.net and she'll contact you early next spring.
- The Foundation for Baltimore County Public Library is continuing its author speaker series. Next up is historian Jon Meacham on Nov. 15, in conversation with Dr. Carla Hayden, former Librarian of Congress (2016-2025) and CEO of the Pratt (1993-2016). Tickets for the 1 p.m. presentation at Goucher College are free, but must be reserved online in advance starting at 2 p.m. on Thursday, Oct. 15 at [Goucher ticket office](#) (warning: tickets go quickly). Book sales are offered before and after the program. Other authors in the series are Anna Quindlen (Feb. 28) and Amor Towles (April 4).
- For a current list of all programs at the Towson branch, check out the "Events" tab on our website at <https://towsonfriends.org/events/>
- You can renew your membership online at <https://towsonfriends.org/support/>