

March 11 at 5:30 p.m. Other series on issues of both current and historical interest are "Seeking Athena: Women's Inspiration & Wisdom," "World Shapers & Visionaries," and "The Liberty of the Ballot: The History & Legacy of the 15th and 19th Amendments."

Until March 31, The Athenaeum features an exhibition titled "Structure & Purpose: The Legacy of Engineering at Keast & Hood," a retrospective about the valuable contribution of structural engineers to building safety, illustrated by original drawings of 20th century landmark architecture. One exhibit describes how Keast & Hood, while inspecting the Academy of Music in March 1989, found structural damage that put the building and its occupants in imminent danger; the Academy was evacuated mid-performance so emergency repairs could be started immediately.

The Athenaeum houses vast collections covering history of architecture, design, and material culture, primarily focused on Philadelphia. It sponsors the Greater Philadelphia GeoHistory Network and the American Architects and Buildings websites used by thousands of researchers including scientists, architects, historians, artists, other professionals, students, and amateurs.

In February 2019, The Athenaeum and the Penn Libraries announced a partnership that enables each institution's patrons to access the other's library holdings. The Sir John Soane's Museum Foundation in New York presented an award to The Athenaeum for its Architectural Drawings Collection at Soane's annual Visionaries Dinner Gala in October 2019.

In May, The Athenaeum of Philadelphia announced a new Executive Director, Beth Shalom Hessel, whose mission is to expand their range of activities and visibility in Philadelphia, grow the collections, cultivate partnerships and collaborations with cultural and community institutions and associations in Philadelphia and nationwide, and increase fund-raising. Hessel, who holds a doctorate in American History, was formerly Executive Director of the Presbyterian Historical Society.

"The Athenaeum of Philadelphia is an exciting organization to be a part of today," Hessel told *The Center City Quarterly*. "Our membership is growing, as empty-nesters, retirees, young

professionals, artists, writers, preservationists, and interested neighbors discover this treasure in their backyard. Our members and guests are discovering a vibrant community of lifelong learners who love great literature, programs that connect our present and the past, and exhibits and research opportunities that reveal previously hidden aspects of our city. Members can pop in for a book or to cozy up in a chair for good conversation and a cup of coffee with a friend. We offer concert series, visits to the opera and area museums, and classes. Our robust program schedule for the winter and spring was designed to include thoughtful discussions of relevant and challenging topics, as well as opportunities to engage with the arts and built environments across the city of Philadelphia. I am tickled to guide this historic organization as we connect our legacy with the future of a great city."

The Athenaeum is one of 18 historic membership libraries in the United States, supported by membership dues, offering resources to the public. There are three levels of membership including Shareholder, Subscriber, and Young Friends, the latter open to people ages 18 to 35. When the Athenaeum of Philadelphia was founded, the free public library system did not exist and most book collections were located in schools, colleges and other institutions.

The Athenaeum building is an Italianate Renaissance Revival gem, designed in 1845 by John Notman, and is reason enough to make a trip across town. It is furnished with mid-19th century decorative and fine arts. A centerpiece is the gorgeous Reading Room on the second floor. Just for fun, on First Fridays, from 5 to 7 p.m., The Athenaeum offers music, pop-up artist galleries, and social hours. On Friday, May 1, the featured exhibition will be the Hand Fan Collection.

The building and its exhibitions, at 219 S. 6th Street, are free and open to the public Monday to Friday, 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Some lectures are free; others require a small admission fee. Detailed information about The Athenaeum's collections, exhibitions, digital resources, events, and membership is available on their website. <http://www.philaathenaeum.org/> For more information or to get on the email list, please contact Gabrielle Rodriguez, Membership and Communications Associate, 215-925-2688.



*Athenaeum Reading Room*