



AT THE LIBRARY

By Julie Winkelstein
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“The mummy tea, held at the Library House Thursday afternoon was a great success financially and socially. Everyone seemed to want to make the acquaintance of the embalmed lady in whose honor the tea was given.”

-From the *Cazenovia Republican* February 7, 1895

One of my sister Rebecca’s childhood memories is the smell of the mummy in the Cazenovia (New York) Public Library. I saw that mummy on a recent trip – although it is now carefully preserved in a climate-controlled case and so there is no smell. It is a remarkable sight, as it lies face-up on a bed of inert Styrofoam covered by linen. Lovely designs decorate the cartonnage – similar to papier-mâché – that covers the head.

As my cousin Jon Holstein explained to me, the mummy and all the other Egyptian items in the glass and wood wall cases, are “basically so kids can get an idea of the ancient world without going to New York.” This was part of my tour of the history museum that is located in the 1820’s building where the Cazenovia Public Library existed from 1890 until 1995. A community campaign called “Building for Books” raised \$1.4 million in 1994 and made it possible for the library to have a beautifully

designed new building, leaving the original house available for the museum, reading rooms and a small gallery with an ongoing display of local art.

Jon was instrumental in designing the layout, lighting and housing for the many objects displayed in the museum, so he was the perfect guide as we looked at Native American art; a glass case of stuffed birds, including three kinds of owls; a Northern Plains otter skin breastplate; a yoke beaded in floral motifs; a marvelous array of eggs in various colors and sizes; a large grey fossil-encrusted rock on a stand where children (and adults) can run their hands over it; and much, much more.

It is called the Museum of Curiosities and it is certainly that. The eclectic mix is entrancing and I’m sure the 1,000 school children who come on class visits every year go away with a lot to talk about. One of my favorite parts was an x-ray of the mummy. It was amazing to see the bones illuminated

continued on page 2

when the backlight was turned on. I could see the crossed arms and even a malignant tumor barely showing behind one of the knees.

Director Betsy Kennedy spent some time showing me around the library. With its high ceilings, burgundy and pink accents and spacious layout, it is a testament to the hard work of local supporters, the Friends of the library and others who came forward to contribute time, ideas and money. I enjoyed talking to her and we discovered many common concerns as we chatted about literacy, storytimes, fundraising, school and library conferences.

The Story Garden where, as Betsy said, they are “growing readers,” is one of the highlights of the library. Flowers and foliage adorn the walls, while various animals (matching the animals in the museum) are evident everywhere. It is a perfect room for storytimes,

with even a convenient bathroom hidden behind a floral painted door.

As I was leaving, I noticed a sign that says: “New Book Display: Reserve your copy by writing your yellow card number on the blue card in the book pocket.” Apparently it is an old system that has been retained - the new books stay on display for one week before they can be checked out. That way, I was told, people can see what the new books look like. I love the juxtaposition of those handwritten blue cards tucked into the pockets and the wireless Internet offered by this inviting, modern and well-loved community library.