

**THE MORGAN EXPLORES THE LIFE AND WORK OF
LEGENDARY AUTHOR BEATRIX POTTER THROUGH HER
RARELY EXHIBITED PICTURE LETTERS**

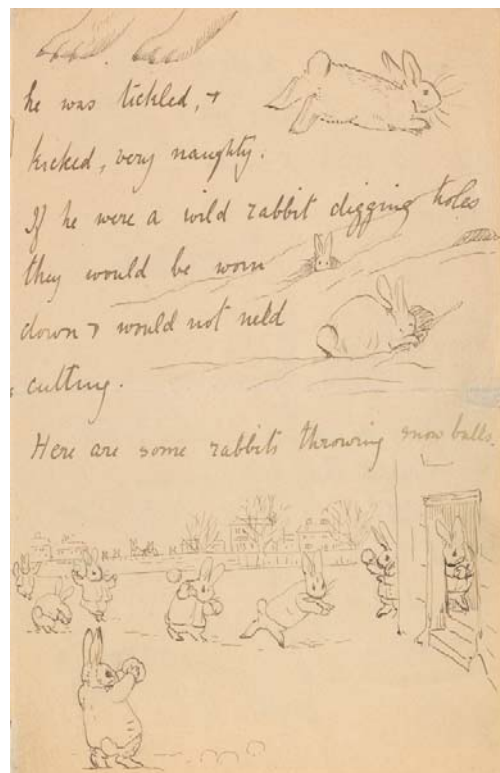
*WRITTEN FOR THE CHILDREN OF A FAMILY FRIEND, THE LETTERS SERVED AS
INSPIRATION FOR HER MOST SUCCESSFUL PUBLISHED WORKS, INCLUDING
THE TALE OF PETER RABBIT AND THE TALE OF SQUIRREL NUTKIN*

Beatrix Potter: The Picture Letters
November 2, 2012–January 27, 2013

Press Preview: Thursday, November 1, 10 a.m. until 11:30 a.m.
RSVP: (212) 590-0393, media@themorgan.org

New York, NY, October 10, 2012—*The Tale of Peter Rabbit* and other books by Beatrix Potter (1866–1943) have become classics of children’s literature and represent one of the most successful publishing enterprises in the history of the British book trade. Yet *Peter Rabbit* began not as a commercial publishing venture, but as a story created to entertain the child of a family friend—all told in an eight-page letter illustrated with pen-drawn vignettes.

Beginning November 2, 2012, The Morgan Library & Museum will explore the extraordinary tale of how a largely self-taught artist and writer used a series of private letters to develop some of the most vividly depicted animal characters in all of children’s literature—in the process creating a wholly original artistic and literary style. On view



Beatrix Potter (1866–1943)
Autograph letter to Noel Moore, February 4,
1895, detail
Gift of Colonel David McC. McKell, 1959
All works, unless noted: The Morgan Library &
Museum, New York

until January 27, 2013, *Beatrix Potter: The Picture Letters* brings together for the first time twenty-two letters from important American private holdings as well as from three major institutional collections: the Morgan, the Victoria & Albert Museum in London, and the Cotsen Children's Library at Princeton University. The letters will be supplemented and enhanced with more than eighty related items, including printed books, original artwork, manuscripts, and early children's toys and games inspired by Potter's stories.

"The Morgan's exhibition program is noted for taking visitors behind-the-scenes with artists and writers as they develop ideas and themes that will become trademarks of their finished work," said William M. Griswold, director of The Morgan Library & Museum. "*Beatrix Potter: The Picture Letters* is an excellent example. The show explores the author's deep, early interest in animals and the natural world and how she drew on this to compose her extraordinary illustrated letters—from which she later created some of the most universally beloved characters and stories in the history of children's literature."

CHILDHOOD FRIENDS

"I had many mouse friends in my youth."



Beatrix Potter with Her Pet Mouse Xarifa, 1885.
Cotsen Children's Library. Department of Rare Books & Special Collections. Princeton University Library
Photography: Princeton University Library

By all accounts Beatrix Potter had a sheltered childhood. She endured strict supervision and a difficult relationship with her parents, especially with her mother. She had no close friendships with young women her age, and the majority of what scholars know about her life from 1881 to 1897 comes from journals she kept, written in a self-invented secret code.

Her closest companion was her younger brother, Bertram, with whom she shared a love of the outdoors and a fascination with natural history. Although strict in many ways, her parents allowed the children to maintain a fully stocked menagerie of animals and insects in their London home. At various times the nursery was home to snails, newts, frogs, bats, salamanders, guinea pigs, hedgehogs, mice, and rabbits, not to mention a tortoise, a snake, a

duck, a kestrel, and a canary. Of the rabbits, her two favorites were Benjamin H. Bouncer and Peter Rabbit, both of whom would be immortalized in her stories.

Many of these animals were treated as pets, but the Potter children also exhibited an unsentimental scientific curiosity about the creatures in their midst. They observed them closely, recorded their distinctive traits, and tried to draw them as accurately as possible. In a letter to his sister regarding a pet bat, Bertram advised, “I think it would be almost wrong to let it go, as we might never catch another of that kind again. If he cannot be kept alive as I suppose he can’t, you had better kill him, & stuff him as well as you can.”

ARTISTIC APPRENTICESHIP

“The modern art student can draw, and has had training I never had in schools; but nobody seems to have [done] the nature study & painstaking [work] behind the actual drawing.”

The Potters could afford to leave town as often as they liked for extended holidays, mostly in Scotland or England’s picturesque Lake District. On these excursions Beatrix explored the countryside, studied nature, and developed her talent for drawing plants and animals. Her sketchbooks contain studies of flowers, portraits of pets, and her earliest attempts to draw comic animals in human garb. She formed her taste in art by visiting galleries in the company of her father, a friend of the painter John Everett Millais.

Although she had lessons in painting and drawing from private tutors, Beatrix developed her own fine drybrush technique in her watercolors of natural history subjects such as lichens, fungi, and insects. The exhibition includes an imposing drawing of a spider she made with a microscope borrowed from her brother.



Beatrix Potter (1866–1943)
Magnified Study of a Male Jumping Spider,
December 18, 1886
Watercolor, pen-and-ink over pencil,
heightened with white, on tinted board
Cotsen Children’s Library. Department of Rare
Books and Special Collections. Princeton
University Library
Photography: Princeton University Library

PRECEDENTS

"Here is another picture of the owl and the pussy cat, after they were married."

Also on view in the exhibition are works by illustrators and writers who influenced Potter's artistic and literary development. Like many Victorian children, she was brought up on the books of Edward Lear, Kate Greenaway, Randolph Caldecott, and other leading illustrators of that era. Her father collected Caldecott drawings, including pen-and-ink sketches for *A Frog He Would A-Wooing Go* (1883), which would inspire one of her earliest commercial efforts, "A Frog He Would a Fishing Go."



Beatrix Potter (1866–1943)
Autograph letter to Noel Moore, March 4, 1897, detail
Gift of Colonel David McC. McKell, 1959

Potter's father gave her a copy of Edward Lear's *Nonsense Songs* when she was four-and-a-half years old. She would later pay homage to Lear with her own illustrations for *The Owl and The Pussy-Cat*, which she retold in two picture letters now in separate collections, but here seen together for the first time in many years. Her version of this nonsense classic includes a sequel, an idyllic portrait of the married couple. "It is funny to see a bird with hands," she noted, "but how could he play the guitar without them?" One

of many comic asides in her letters, this perfectly crafted offhand comment prefigures her own story-telling style, which was greatly influenced by Lear.

FORERUNNERS TO PETER RABBIT

"An affectionate companion and a quiet friend."

Potter continued to develop her artistic skills through her teens and early twenties. She often used her pet mice and rabbits as models for her exquisitely delicate watercolors, several of which will be shown. Her professional career began at age twenty-four when she started to design greeting cards using her pet rabbit Benjamin as a model. Among her earliest commercial products are rabbit drawings for a Christmas keepsake with a text in doggerel verse supplied by one of the

publisher's regular authors. She also touched on Christmas themes in *The Rabbits' Christmas Party*, a series of watercolors now counted among her finest work. They may originally have been intended for publication but were ultimately given away to friends and relatives. Formerly owned by her brother Bertram, the first watercolor in the series is on display.

The exhibition also features a charming pen, ink, and wash drawing, *Cinderella's Coach with Rabbits*. It is one of several drawings on the subject, but this one had the greatest significance for the artist. She gave this moonlit romantic fantasy to her fiancé, Norman Warne, on the day of their engagement. Potter's parents did not approve of the match



Beatrix Potter (1866–1943)
Cinderella's Coach with Rabbits. 1899
Private Collection

with Warne, a member of the firm that published her books, but allowed her to make marriage plans without announcing them publicly. Like Cinderella, she might have yearned to escape from domestic drudgery and dreamed of building a new life as an independent married woman. Tragically, Warne died just a few months after they were engaged.

PICTURE LETTERS

“It is much more satisfactory to address a real live child; I often think that that was the secret of the success of Peter Rabbit, it was written to a child — not made to order.”

Long before Beatrix Potter, artists wrote picture letters for reference, study, instruction, and entertainment. The exhibition includes several examples, including a humorous note by the novelist William Makepeace Thackeray, who declines a dinner invitation with a caricature of himself at the moment of remembering a previous engagement. A similar self-caricature can be seen in his masterwork, *Vanity Fair*. Likewise, picture letters by Edward Lear and illustrator Richard Doyle will be shown to have intriguing connections with the best known work of these Victorian artists, both greatly admired by Beatrix Potter.



Beatrix Potter (1866–1943)
Autograph letter to Noel Moore, March 11,
1892, detail
Gift of Colonel David McC. McKell, 1959.

The exhibition features two of Potter's earliest known picture letters as well as the most famous one, containing the original story of Peter Rabbit. The earliest surviving letters were written in 1892 to Noel and Eric Moore, sons of her former governess, Annie Moore. Noel was only four years old at that time, Eric only three. Both letters are couched in language easily understandable to small children and are filled with illustrations intended to pique the boys' interest and retain their attention. A year later, in September 1893 while on a summer holiday in Scotland, Potter wrote another picture letter to Noel Moore. "My dear Noel," she began, "I don't know what to write to you, so I shall tell you a story about four little rabbits whose names were Flopsy, Mopsy, Cottontail and Peter." This is how she first described the misadventures of Peter Rabbit in Mr. McGregor's garden. One of the bestselling children's books of all time, a highpoint in the

history of children's literature, *The Tale of Peter Rabbit* was based on this impromptu eight-page letter composed with no thought of publication nor any commercial ambitions or constraints. Frederick Warne & Company, a division of Penguin Group, has very kindly loaned the original manuscript to the Morgan for this exhibition.

Potter continued to send illustrated letters to members of the Moore family throughout the 1890s, recounting amusing anecdotes, impressions of her holidays, and the adventures of other animal characters. Around 1900, at the urging of Annie Moore, Potter began to explore the possibility of making commercial publications out of the stories she had written in her picture letters. She borrowed them back from the children and decided to start with *Peter Rabbit*.

MISS POTTER AND HER PUBLISHERS

“I think Miss Potter will go off to another publisher soon!”



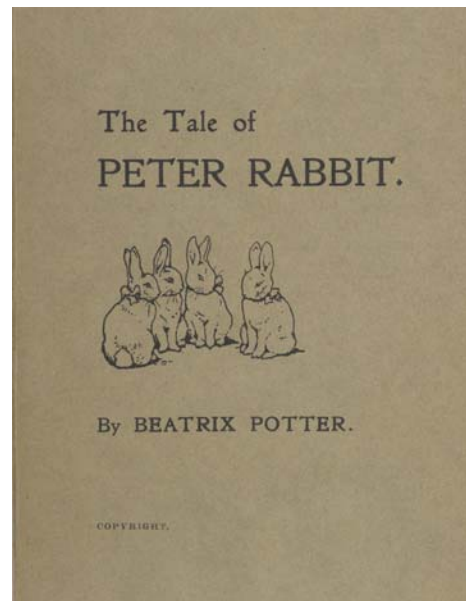
Beatrix Potter (1866–1943)
Autograph letter to Marjory Moore, March 13, 1900,
detail
Gift of Colonel David McC. McKell, 1959

At least six publishing firms rejected the manuscript of her revised and enlarged *Peter Rabbit*. Some of them objected to the black-and-white illustrations she had prepared, disregarding the trend for color illustration in the children’s books of that time. She had strong opinions about the price and size of the book (a vignette in a letter to Noel Moore’s sister, Marjorie, shows a heated argument between a publisher and Potter who demands a smaller, cheaper booklet that “little rabbits” could afford).

Determined to have her way, Potter privately printed her own edition of *The Tale of Peter Rabbit* in December 1901. A copy of that edition (featuring the black-and-white illustrations she wanted) will be on view along with a zinc block for one of the illustrations.

After months of negotiations, Potter finally came to terms with the firm Frederick Warne and Company, which issued the first trade edition of *The Tale of Peter Rabbit* in October 1902. The first printing sold out even before publication, and 28,000 copies were in print by the end of the year.

Peter Rabbit marked the beginning of Potter’s decades-long relationship with Frederick Warne and Company. The determination and exacting standards she exhibited during negotiations over *Peter Rabbit* characterized her approach to each of the books she went on to publish with the firm. She constantly adjusted her work to arrive at the best possible plot structure, word choice,



Beatrix Potter (1866–1943)
The Tale of Peter Rabbit
London: privately printed, December, 1901
Gift of Julia P. Wightman, 1991
Frederick Warne & Co. is the owner of all rights, copyrights and trademarks in the Beatrix Potter character names and illustrations.

and placement of images, and she demanded equal attention to detail from her publisher. After the Warne firm failed to obtain copyright protection for *Peter Rabbit* in America—thus leaving the field open for a flood of pirated editions—Potter stoutly defended her rights to all of her subsequent publications and related merchandise.

CONGENIAL CREATURES

“I don’t think I have ever seriously considered the state of the pie, but I think the book runs some risk of being over-cooked if it goes on much longer!”

While working on *Peter Rabbit*, Potter wrote another story for one of Noel Moore’s sisters, *The Tailor of Gloucester*. Once again she borrowed back the manuscript and produced a privately printed edition. A copy is on display along with a copy of the trade edition, which omitted some of her favorite illustrations as well as a number of the nursery rhymes that she had inserted in the story. Although *The Tailor* “never caught on like the others,” Potter recalled, “he is far the best.”



Beatrix Potter (1866–1943)
Illustration from *The Tale of Benjamin Bunny*
Gift of Julia P. Wightman, 1991
Frederick Warne & Co. is the owner of all rights, copyrights and trademarks in the Beatrix Potter character names and illustrations.

Potter continued to write and illustrate at a rapid pace, offering her readers *The Tale of Squirrel Nutkin* (1903)—a story spun out of her longest picture letter, in which she imagined squirrels constructing rafts to harvest nuts on an island. Soon after came *The Tale of Benjamin Bunny*, a sequel to *Peter Rabbit*. Simpler and more straightforward than *The Tailor*, *Benjamin Bunny* contains some of her best drawings of garden scenery and a text rich in humor and vivid detail, perfectly paced with her characteristic attention to the subtleties of literary style.

In 1906 Potter wrote *The Story of a Fierce Bad Rabbit* for a six-year-old who thought that Peter Rabbit was not so bad at heart and asked for an account of a truly wicked rabbit. This book first appeared in an accordion-fold format. Instead of turning pages, younger readers could follow the progression of ideas by watching the story unfold panel by panel and scanning several episodes at once. This experiment in graphic

design proved to be a failure because shopkeepers complained that the books were too difficult to handle. But the original manuscript survives and can be compared in this exhibition with the published version side by side, both in their entirety—nine feet long.

Potter believed that her books had succeeded because she had written them with particular children in mind, either as picture letters or illustrated manuscripts. She sought to preserve the vitality of the original stories when she reworked them for publication, introducing new characters and designing additional illustrations. In this exhibition one can see the creative process at work, beginning with these highly personal mementos and ending in such beloved classics as *The Tale of Mr. Jeremy Fisher*, *The Tale of Tom Kitten*, *The Tale of Mrs. Tittlemouse*, *The Tale of Samuel Whiskers*, and *The Tale of Little Pig Robinson*.

TOYS AND GAMES

“Bite him, Pickles! bite him!” spluttered Ginger behind a sugar barrel, ‘he’s only a German doll!’”

Potter’s keen business acumen extended beyond her books to what she referred to as “side-shows,” or merchandising ventures. It was extremely important to her that her characters be reproduced as faithfully to the original as possible, and she took an active part in the design of toys and games based on her characters. On view will be several examples of commercial products inspired by her work, including dolls, painting books, and a board game.



Beatrix Potter (1866–1943)
Peter Rabbit's Race Game
London: Frederick Warne & Co., ca. 1917
Cotsen Children's Library. Department of Rare Books and Special Collections.
Princeton University Library
Photography: Princeton University Library

Potter resented foreign infringements on her merchandising rights, especially Peter Rabbit dolls made in Germany and sold in England at discount prices. A Peter Rabbit doll thought to have been made in Germany around 1909 will be on display. She campaigned against these German imports by printing leaflets and posters pleading for tariff reform and took her revenge by

ridiculing them in *The Tale of Two Bad Mice* and *The Tale of Ginger and Pickles*. Potter and her publisher eventually capitulated and arranged for the manufacture of an authorized Peter Rabbit doll in Germany, although not entirely to her satisfaction. In one of her leaflets she lamented that stuffed Peter Rabbits were “now made by scores in Frau H——’s factory in Germany.”

A Jemima Puddle-Duck doll on display was executed completely under her direction. She registered the design at the Patent Office in 1910 and even succeeded in getting the dolls made at a highly reputable British firm. Jemima dolls are available to this day, although the cuddly modern versions have no resemblance to the delightfully daft original.

LIFE ON HILL TOP FARM

“Somehow when one is up to the eyes in work with real live animals it makes one despise paper-book animals — but I mustn’t say that to my publisher!”



Beatrix Potter (1866–1943)
Pictorial endpapers from *Cecily Parsley's Nursery Rhymes*
London; and New York: Frederick Warne & Co, Ltd., ca.1922
Purchased on the Elisabeth Ball Fund, 2011
Frederick Warne & Co. is the owner of all rights, copyrights and trademarks in the Beatrix Potter character names and illustrations.

In 1905 Potter purchased Hill Top Farm in Sawrey in what would be the first of many property transactions in the Lake District. Although her farm served as the setting for several of her books, Potter's vision was failing and she increasingly relied on artwork she had created in decades past to produce stories for her publisher.

In the last decades of her life, Potter's farm, the acquisition of nearby properties, and the breeding and showing of Herdwick sheep, became her highest priorities. When she died in December 1943 Beatrix Potter left to the National Trust over 4,000 acres of land in the Lake District that had inspired so many of her letters and tales.

PUBLIC PROGRAMS

GALLERY TALK

Beatrix Potter: The Picture Letters

Friday, November 2, 7 pm

An informal exhibition tour led by John Bidwell, Astor Curator and Department Head, Department of Printed Books and Bindings.

Free

FAMILY PROGRAM

Draw Your Fruits and Veggies . . . and Eat Them Too

Saturday, November 3, 2–4 pm

Natural science was Beatrix Potter's first love, and her exceptional eye for nature's most minute details served her well when she became a famous writer and illustrator. In an exciting mix of science, art, and healthy snacks, Eileen Gunning, President of the Guild of Natural Science Illustrators, will lead families in observing, drawing, and eating their fruits and vegetables! Appropriate for ages 6–12.

Tickets

\$6; \$4 for Morgan Members; \$2 for Children

212-685-0008 x560; themorgan.org/programs

Please note that this workshop is limited to families with children; there is limit of two adult tickets per family.

FAMILY PROGRAM

Sunday Storytime in Mr. Morgan's Library

Sundays at 11:30 am and 2:30 pm, November 4, 2012 through January 27, 2013

Families are invited to join some of their favorite Beatrix Potter storybook friends—Peter Rabbit, Jemima Puddle-Duck, and Tom Kitten—for Sunday Storytime in Mr. Morgan's Library. This one-hour drop-in program offers families a refresher on the beloved tales before viewing the exhibition *Beatrix Potter: The Picture Letters*. Presented in cooperation with The Beatrix Potter Society. Appropriate for ages 2 and up.

Free with museum admission (\$15 Adults; \$10 Teens (13-16); \$10 Seniors (65 and over); Free for members and children 12 and under). Free to Cool Culture members.

SYMPOSIUM

Yours Sincerely, Beatrix Potter

Letters and Librarians

This symposium, which coincides with the Morgan's exhibition *Beatrix Potter: The Picture Letters*, will address the important role Potter's letters to children played in the development of her stories, including *The Tale of Peter Rabbit* and other books notable for their playful wit, simple charm, and exquisite illustrations. Cosponsored by The Beatrix Potter Society.

Friday, November 16, 6:30 pm

Friends Indeed: Beatrix Potter and the New York Public Library's Anne Carroll Moore
Leonard Marcus, children's literature historian

Saturday, November 17, 11 am–3:30 pm

Picture Letters for Real Children

John Bidwell, Astor Curator and Department Head, Printed Books and Bindings, The Morgan Library & Museum

Beatrix Potter's Letters to Children

Judy Taylor, former chairman of The Beatrix Potter Society, publisher, biographer

The Secret Success of Peter Rabbit

Elizabeth James, Senior Librarian, National Art Library, Victoria and Albert Museum

Tickets

\$60; \$50 for Morgan Members

212-685-0008 x560; www.themorgan.org/programs

FAMILY PROGRAM

Winter Family Day

Sunday, December 2, 2–5 pm

This year's annual Winter Family Day celebrates the exhibition *Beatrix Potter: The Picture Letters* and the Morgan's annual display of Charles Dickens's *A Christmas Carol*. Peter Rabbit, Jeremy Fisher, Jemima Puddle-Duck, and some of their most mischievous friends will join forces with Scrooge, Bob Cratchit, and the Ghost of Christmas Present to sweep families into a whirlwind of exuberant fun! Families are invited to join this merry bunch and enjoy puppets, an art workshop, strolling characters, a costume photo shoot, and more. Appropriate for ages 3–12.

Free with museum admission (\$15 Adults; \$10 Teens (13-16); \$10 Seniors (65 and over); Free for members and children 12 and under).

FILM

Miss Potter

Friday, December 7, 7 pm

(2006, 92 minutes)

Director: Chris Noonan

Creatively combining stories from the life of Beatrix Potter (Renée Zellweger) with animated sequences of some of her beloved characters, this charming film tells the story of the famous author and illustrator, and her trials and adventures along the road to publishing the children's books which have delighted generations for ages. Also starring Ewan McGregor and Emily Watson. This screening coincides with the Morgan's exhibition *Beatrix Potter: The Picture Letters*.

Free with museum admission (\$15 Adults; \$10 Teens (13-16); \$10 Seniors (65 and over); Free for members and children 12 and under).

FAMILY FILM

The World of Peter Rabbit and Friends

Saturday, January 12, 2–3 pm

What if you suddenly saw Peter Rabbit run through Mr. McGregor's lush rows of cabbages, losing his jacket and shoes before making it home safely? In these excerpts from the beautifully animated BBC series inspired by Beatrix Potter's illustrations, favorite characters spring to life. Following the film, children will be invited to share their thoughts with a member of The Beatrix Potter Society. Appropriate for ages 3–10.

Tickets

\$6; \$4 for Morgan Members; \$2 for Children
212-685-0008 x560; themorgan.org/programs

ADULT ART PROGRAM

Learning from Beatrix Potter: Children's Book Design 101

Friday, January 18, 6–9 pm

Inspired by the Morgan's exhibition *Beatrix Potter: The Picture Letters*, Pat Cummings, Parsons and Pratt faculty member, children's book illustrator, and author, will lead participants in the writing and designing of a short children's book. She will also be available to sign copies of her books.

Tickets

\$20; \$15 for Morgan Members
212-685-0008 x560; themorgan.org/programs

SPONSORSHIP

Beatrix Potter: The Picture Letters is organized by John Bidwell, Astor Curator and Department Head, Department of Printed Books and Bindings at the Morgan.

This exhibition is underwritten by Barbara and James Runde, and by Susan and Peter Solomon and Peter J. Solomon Company, L. P.

Major funding is provided by Barbara Hanson Pierce, Michael Francis Hanson, and Robert Hixon Hanson in memory of their mother, Margaret Hixon Hanson.

Further generous support is provided by The Caroline Macomber Fund, Rudy and Sara Ruggles, Justin G. Schiller, Ltd., and The Frelinghuysen Foundation.



Sponsored by Penguin Group (USA) Inc.



The activities of The Morgan Library & Museum are made possible in part by the New York State Council on the Arts with the support of Governor Andrew Cuomo and the New York State Legislature.

The Morgan Library & Museum

The Morgan Library & Museum began as the private library of financier Pierpont Morgan, one of the preeminent collectors and cultural benefactors in the United States. Today, more than a century after its founding in 1906, the Morgan serves as a museum, independent research library, musical venue, architectural landmark, and historic site. In October 2010, the Morgan completed the first-ever restoration of its original McKim building, Pierpont Morgan's private library, and the core of the institution. In tandem with the 2006 expansion project by architect Renzo Piano, the Morgan now provides visitors unprecedented access to its world-renowned collections of drawings, literary and historical manuscripts, musical scores, medieval and Renaissance manuscripts, printed books, and ancient Near Eastern seals and tablets.

General Information

The Morgan Library & Museum

225 Madison Avenue, at 36th Street, New York, NY 10016-3405

212.685.0008

www.themorgan.org

Just a short walk from Grand Central and Penn Station

Hours

Tuesday–Thursday, 10:30 a.m. to 5 p.m.; extended Friday hours, 10:30 a.m. to 9 p.m.; Saturday, 10 a.m. to 6 p.m.; Sunday, 11 a.m. to 6 p.m.; closed Mondays, Thanksgiving Day, Christmas Day, and New Year's Day. The Morgan closes at 4 p.m. on Christmas Eve and New Year's Eve. The Morgan will be open on the following holiday Mondays in 2012: Labor Day, September 3; Columbus Day, October 8; Christmas Eve, December 24; New Year's Eve, December 31.

Admission

\$15 for adults; \$10 for students, seniors (65 and over), and children (under 16); free to Members and children 12 and under accompanied by an adult. Admission is free on Fridays from 7 to 9 p.m. Admission is not required to visit the Morgan Shop.