

# PROCEDURES FOR HANDLING COLLECTION COMPLAINTS

The Berkshire Athenaeum is willing to re-examine its position on any item in the library's collections. These procedures have been established to deal with objections to materials owned by the Library. No item shall be removed or restricted because of a complaint except in accordance with this procedure.

## 1. INITIAL COMPLAINT:

Complainants who come in person, or submit complaints by telephone or by letter should be offered a copy of the REQUEST FOR RECONSIDERATION OF LIBRARY MATERIALS form (appended) on which their formal complaint may be submitted. To activate the reconsideration procedures, a complaint must be in writing on the approved forms. Anonymous telephone calls, rumors and voiced concerns are not sufficient to initiate action. Action occurs only when the REQUEST FOR RECONSIDERATION form is returned. Complainants should also be offered a copy of the Berkshire Athenaeum Collection Development / Maintenance Policy to review.

## 2. PRELIMINARY REVIEW:

As soon as a complaint has been filed, the objections should be reviewed by the person(s) that selected the item or is responsible for that part of the collection. The item should be read, viewed or listened to in its entirety by the selector, the original reasons for purchase should be evaluated, and objections should be considered in terms of the Library's materials selection policy, the principles of the LIBRARY BILL OF RIGHTS, and the opinions of the various reviewing sources used in materials selection.

## 3. PRELIMINARY RESPONSE:

The objections and the preliminary response should be forwarded to the Library Director, who should review the response and either add relevant comments or return the response to the individual selector for further clarification, following which the selector should make a written response to the complainant.

It is critical that the review process be as objective as possible. If the challenged item does not meet the Library's selection criteria, then the Library should be ready to acknowledge that the material is unsuitable and withdraw it from the collection. If, on the other hand, the material does meet the selection criteria and is deemed suitable for the collection, the Library should respond to the complainant clearly and precisely. The response should also inform the complainant how to pursue the matter further.

## 4. ALERT THE TRUSTEES:

Simultaneous with the preliminary review and the formulation of a preliminary response, the Library Director should routinely notify the Trustees that a formal complaint has been made.

5. FIRST APPEAL:

If the complainant is not satisfied with the preliminary response, the Library Director is the person to whom an initial appeal is made. The complainant should be contacted promptly by the Director, the library's decision should be explained, and further discussions welcomed.

6. SECOND APPEAL:

If the complainant still feels that the problem has been dealt with inadequately, a final appeal to the Trustees of the Berkshire Athenaeum can be made. The appeal should be submitted in writing and will be placed on the agenda of the next regularly scheduled Trustees meeting, at which time the Board will conduct a challenge hearing to provide the forum for the complainant to air objections to the title in the collection and the recommendation of the Library Director. It should be announced at the beginning of the hearing that the Board will issue its decision at the following regularly scheduled meeting, and that the hearing is simply to hear all sides of the issue.