

EDITH WHARTON'S NEW YORK CITY: A BACKWARD GLANCE

MARCH 15-DECEMBER 31, 2012



This new exhibition celebrates the 150th anniversary of the birth of author Edith Wharton. One of America's most acclaimed writers, Edith Jones was born January 24, 1862 at 14 West 23 Street into an old New York family with links back to colonial New York City. The narrow world of nineteenth-century New York society inspired Wharton's greatest fiction, from *The House of Mirth* to *The Age of Innocence*.

The exhibition reveals exciting new information about Wharton's world and the New York Society Library, then located at 67 University Place. Wharton's father, George Frederic

Jones, withdrew books from the Library, as did many other family members, including Wharton's sister-in-law Mary Cadwalader Jones—like Wharton, a close friend of Henry James. On display will be rare family portraits, Wharton letters to family members, and first editions of novels and short stories, including Wharton's autobiography *A Backward Glance*. The exhibition will showcase several books Wharton read as a girl, on loan from the Mount in Lenox, Massachusetts.

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THE NEW YORK SOCIETY LIBRARY
53 EAST 79TH STREET, NEW YORK, NEW YORK

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"When you see this beautiful book and the others, it's a very direct connection to the person you're trying to understand," said Harriet Shapiro, the show's curator. "This was an interesting world, and the Joneses had been part of the New York Society library for generations. It means a great deal to us to bring this to the public, and we've had the good fortune to find material that's rare." ...The gilded social world amid the old New York brownstones and its intercontinental heiresses captured by Wharton — and now in the spotlight with the popular television show *Downton Abbey*, which features an American among the British aristocracy — is long gone. It was disappearing during the writer's lifetime, but Shapiro wondered what Wharton would have thought of the world of today with people walking around in shorts and earbuds for their iPods. "Her world was so structured," Shapiro said. "Everything has changed, but the beauty of her fiction and the passion it evokes remain."

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"...if you, like me, relish original source materials and happen to live in (or plan to visit) the great city whose 19th century pretentious society inspired classic stories of stifled passions and lost love, and introduced us to emblematic characters such as Newland Archer and Countess Ellen Olenska, there is no better place I can recommend you visit this year than New York's oldest library, the one to which Edith and her family belonged."

—C.M. Rubin, *Huffington Post*

