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(City Librarian John F. Szabo unveils recently discovered section of the Well of Scribes.)

50-Year Mystery Solved: Section of Central Library's Long-Lost Sculpture "Well of the Scribes" Discovered in Arizona and Returned to Los Angeles

One question remains: Where are the other two pieces of the Well of the Scribes?

Los Angeles, October 4, 2019—Today Los Angeles City Librarian John F. Szabo unveiled a long-lost section of the 1926 sculpture "Well of the Scribes" that went missing from the Central Library gardens 50 years ago. It was found in July and was returned to the library October 3. Although this discovery solves one mystery, another mystery remains: where are the other two pieces of the Well of the Scribes?

"I am thrilled that this portion of Lee Lawrie's Well of the Scribes has returned home to the Los Angeles Public Library," said City Librarian John F. Szabo. "Libraries always have

(more)

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fascinating stories, and fortunately for us, this chapter of the mystery is solved. We are extremely hopeful that the remaining parts of the Well can be found."

The semi-circular bronze sculpture, created by Lee Lawrie in 1926, formed a basin that was part of the water features in the library gardens. Rendered in a subtly detailed relief, the sculpture was cast in three sections: a Pegasus, symbolizing inspiration; a panel of elegantly detailed scribes from eastern culture; and the found panel that depicts figures from western culture. The basin graced the gardens from the library's opening in 1926 until 1969 when the gardens were razed to make room for a parking lot and the sculpture disappeared.

For decades, the sculpture's fate was a mystery. Had it found its way into the hands of a private collector, or been melted down, or abandoned and forgotten in a scrap yard?

This decades-long mystery captured the imagination of Susan Orlean, who wrote about it in her 2018 bestseller, *The Library Book*. Prompted by the tale in Orlean's book, journalist Brandon Reynolds wrote a story for *Alta* magazine about the sculpture's disappearance in the hopes that he would unearth something new. When the article was published in July 2019, the sculpture was still nowhere to be found.

Then, antique dealer, Floyd Lillard in Bisbee, AZ read the illustrated *Alta* story and immediately recognized a photo of the Well of the Scribes. Ten years earlier, he had purchased a section of the sculpture from another antique dealer without information about its provenance.

Lillard contacted Los Angeles City Librarian John F. Szabo with the news that he had one of three sections of the sculpture. Szabo traveled to Bisbee, met Lillard, and saw what is indeed a portion of the long-lost Well of the Scribes. Lillard was eager to have the sculpture return to its original home at the Central Library. On October 3, it was packed and delivered to the Central Library, where discussions are now underway for displaying the sculpture for the public.

A recipient of the nation's highest honor for library service—the National Medal from the Institute of Museum and Library Services, the Los Angeles Public Library serves the largest and most diverse urban population of any library in the nation. Its Central Library, 72 branch libraries, collection of more than 6 million books, state-of the-art technology accessible at www.lapl.org, and more than 25,000 public programs a year provide everyone with free and easy access to information and the opportunity for lifelong learning.

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