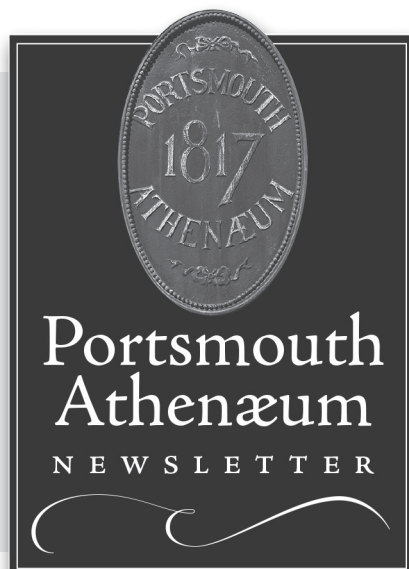


Summer/Fall 2021

*News and events for
Proprietors, Subscribers & Friends
of the Portsmouth Athenæum*

THE PORTSMOUTH ATHENÆUM
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GEORGIAN GARDENS BLOOM ANEW IN RANDALL GALLERY

By TOM HARDIMAN, *Keeper*

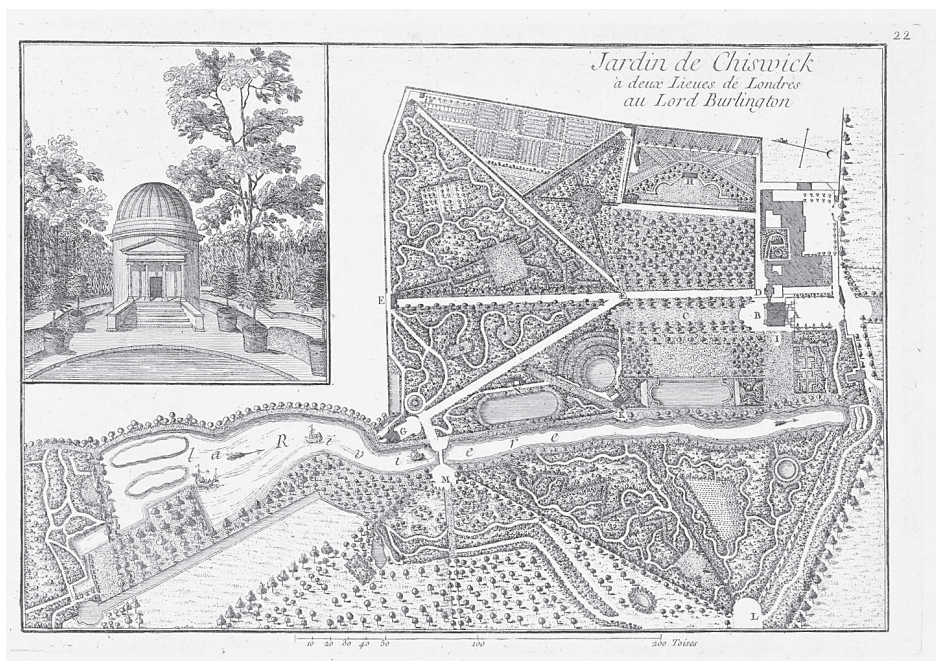
THE EXHIBIT “The Georgian Garden in Print and in Portsmouth, 1714-1830” will be open in the Randall Gallery through Nov. 6.

The Georgian Period was an era of revolution in society, politics, industry, and garden design. Enthusiastic and imaginative gardeners broke out of the box of the rectangular enclosed gardens of Tudor times and embraced asymmetrical beds, meandering pathways, sweeping views, water features, and eye-catching follies.

Master garden designers such as Lancelot “Capability” Brown and Humphry Repton transformed whole landscapes, reshaping hills, draining bogs, moving trees, diverting streams and digging lakes, all to create a meticulously engineered illusion of idyllic nature.

The beauty of these created sanctuaries was admired and imitated throughout Europe and America. The primary means of spreading the information was through printed books and engravings.

The star of the exhibition is a rare copy of George Louis Le Rouge’s “Jardins Anglo-Chinois,” published serially between 1775 and 1789.



George Louis Le Rouge’s “Jardins Anglo-Chinois” was published serially between 1775 and 1789 and described as “the most voluminous and most important engraved work concerning the history of European gardens during the 18th century.” Pictured is the garden of Lord Burlington’s Chiswick House in London.

PORTSMOUTH ATHENÆUM IMAGE

Art historian Bernard Korzus describes it as “the most voluminous and most important engraved work concerning the history of European gardens during the 18th century. As

a whole this publication contains the most complete collection of views of gardens of Anglo-Chinese or any other mode.”

CONTINUED ON PAGE 6

PORTSMOUTH SCHOOL RECORDS NOW ONLINE

By PEGGY HODGES, *Library Committee Chairman*

IF YOUR ANCESTOR was a Portsmouth High School student between 1846 and 1902, you can now find her in class lists and learn about her classmates, teachers and studies — all online.

This new, fully searchable database is the result of an exciting collaboration between the Athenaeum, the New England Historic Genealogical Society (NEHGS), and the Portsmouth Public Library, which have joined forces to digitize and index all 122 volumes of historic Portsmouth school records on deposit at the Athenaeum.

These valuable records, which contain a wealth of genealogical and historical information, will be accessible to researchers online at the Athenaeum and all over the world through www.AmericanAncestors.org, NEHGS's superb research website. The new database of Portsmouth High School records contains eight of the 122 original volumes and over 2,300 pages of information, including more than 48,000 searchable records and 5,000 searchable names.

NEHGS Associate Director of Database Search and Systems Don LeClair recognized the Athenaeum records' unique contribution to the online collections, stating, "We are excited to add the Portsmouth, NH: High School Students, 1846-1902 database to American Ancestors, as it goes beyond simple vital records and provides a unique and personal insight into Portsmouth ancestors and their high school experience."

The digitization project began in the fall of 2019, just before the COVID-19 pandemic started to spread around the world. Athenaeum and Public Library staff and volunteers completed the work of preparing the volumes of old records for scanning, rehousing them in acid-free storage boxes, and delivering the first group of records to NEHGS in Boston.

NEHGS volunteers completed the task of scanning the records



The Athenaeum, the New England Historic Genealogical Society and Portsmouth Public Library joined forces to digitize and index all 122 volumes of historic Portsmouth School Records on deposit at the Athenaeum. Pictured is Portsmouth's former high school on Daniel Street, later City Hall.

PORTSMOUTH ATHENAEUM IMAGE

just before the pandemic shutdown. Through the exceptional efforts of NEHGS staff, a crack group of volunteers was recruited and trained for the exacting work of indexing the records, and over the months of lockdown these volunteers, working remotely from their homes, extracted key information from the digitized records, page by page, entering it into Excel spreadsheets.

The information in the spreadsheets has now been posted as a searchable database at www.AmericanAncestors.org. After their information is uploaded to the NEHGS database, the original volumes of Portsmouth school records will be housed at the Portsmouth Public Library.

Many, many people contributed their time and expertise to this important project.

The Athenaeum would like express special thanks to NEHGS staff members Don LeClair, Database Manager for Digital Projects Molly Rogers and Database Services Volunteer Coordinator Rachel Adams; Portsmouth Public Library's Supervisor of Reference Services Nicole Cloutier and Special Collections Librarian Katie Czajkowski; and the several dozen local and long-distance rehousing and indexing volunteers whose work was essential to our success.

PORTSMOUTH ATHENAEUM NEWSLETTER

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FROM THE ORKNEY ISLANDS TO THE ATHENAEUM ARCHIVES

By CAROLYN MARVIN, *Research Librarian*

WHEN A RESEARCH query came in from the small island of Sanday in the Orkney archipelago northeast of Scotland, I was intrigued.

Why was a woman from the Orkneys requesting archival material from the Athenaeum's Whipple-Spence-Traill Collection?

It turns out artist Carolyn Dixon was interested in Robert Traill, who had owned considerable land in the islands before immigrating to America — specifically Portsmouth — where he married into the Whipple family and became a merchant of means in New Hampshire.

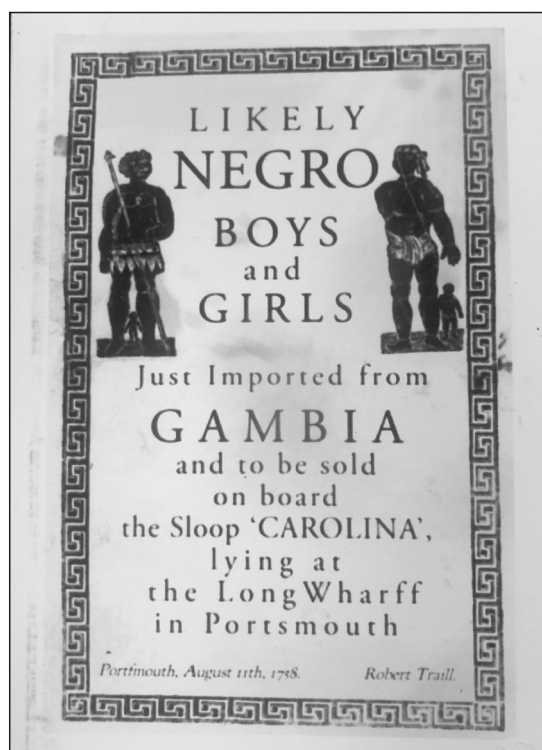
He was also a slave owner and importer, bringing in slaves to sell at Portsmouth's Long Wharf. And that's what Dixon hoped to explore in the documents and letters of our collections: How Robert Traill and the Orkneys were involved as part of the slave trade route.

Dixon's goal was to fill in a lost part of Orkney history.



Artist Carolyn Dixon relied on Athenaeum records to help fill in a lost part of Orkney Island history, creating an illustrated history of the life of Robert Traill with the help of Athenaeum Research Librarian Carolyn Marvin. This page shows a slave trade route connecting the Orkneys and Portsmouth.

Robert Traill married into the Whipple family and was a merchant who owned and imported slaves, bringing them in to sell at Portsmouth's Long Wharf.



She was also creating an art book about Traill with a series of colored prints constructed so as to fold out into an illustrated history of his life, both in the Orkneys and Portsmouth.

Over the course of six months of correspondence and research, we became long-distance friends, sharing tales of COVID isolation, photographs of Orkney, and of course, her artwork.

A limited number of copies of her book were made, one of which was placed in the museum in Kirkwall, the largest town and administrative center of Orkney.

Dixon was gracious enough to gift a copy to the Athenaeum.

Her new project involves making a true-to-size print of the Brookes' slave ship galley demonstrating the horrific conditions suffered by the 454 people crammed into the hold. Made in 1787, the print was widely used in the abolitionist movement.

AUTHORS AT THE ATHENAEUM

MY ORIGINAL INTENTION was to put together a short piece profiling notable visitors to the Athenaeum over its 200-plus years. No doubt there have been many, but the process of wading through visitor registers dating to the 1820s proved too daunting, as well as the likelihood that many, if not most, worthies visited but did not register. (*Related story, Page 8.*)

An alternative concept presented itself: create sketches of a few individuals known to have visited the Athenaeum who were writers, preferably ones who had something to say about the institution. What follows, then, are four brief pieces on such individuals, with the caveat that many more such people are almost certainly waiting to be discovered.

Thomas Bailey Aldrich

Thomas Bailey Aldrich (1836-1907), probably best known for his “The Story of a Bad Boy,” was a Portsmouth native who gained considerable distinction in the literary world and counted Mark Twain as one of his closest acquaintances. His “An Old Town by the Sea” is a delightful collection of sketches and reminiscences about Portsmouth, written in a deftly humorous way. In this short book he describes a visit to the roof of the Athenaeum’s 1805 building, with observations as fresh as though they had been written yesterday rather than close to 150 years ago. Here’s an excerpt:

“Among the prominent buildings [on Congress Street] is the Athenaeum, containing a reading-room and library. From the high roof of the building the stroller will do well to take a glance at the surrounding territory. He will naturally turn seaward for the more picturesque aspects. If the day is clear, he will see the famous Isles of Shoals, lying nine miles away...

“From this elevation... the navy yard, the river with its bridges and islands, the clustered gables of Kittery and Newcastle, and the illimitable ocean beyond make a picture worth climbing four or five flights to gaze upon.”

Anita Shreve

Anita Shreve (1946-2018) published a best-selling novel in 1997 titled “The Weight of Water.” Based on the 1873 murders of two women on Smuttynose Island at the Isles of Shoals, the roman a clef begins with a purported visit to the Athenaeum by a fictional author who stumbles upon (and then purloins) a diary detailing the murders as described by a jealous perpetrator.

Shreve’s highly plausible account angered some Athenaeum

Proprietors, who felt that it reflected poorly on the Athenaeum’s security (overlooking the fact that the account was fictional). In 1997, just after the novel’s publication, Shreve was invited to speak at the Athenaeum by Proprietor Maryellen Burke, who had met her at Star Island. Shreve’s talk, delivered to a standing-room-only audience, was a great success.

James T. Fields

James T. Fields (1817-1881) was a Portsmouth native who spent the first fourteen years of his life on Gates Street in the South End before relocating to Boston. An avid reader, late in his life he recalled in a talk given to young students that one of his happiest memories was of reading by the arched windows in the Reading Room.

It’s entirely possible, if not likely, that Fields was the subject of several attempts by Boards of Directors of the time to curb the use of Athenaeum facilities by boys. It is gratifying to know that now, almost 200 years later, a lad once sat next to those same windows that exist today, developing a love of reading that would one day inspire him to become the leading publisher of his time, one who counted such luminaries as Wordsworth, Hawthorne, Dickens, and Longfellow as close personal friends.

Ogden Nash

Ogden Nash (1902-1971) was a prolific writer famous for his short verses, amusing poems, and a Broadway play, as well as humorous poems for each movement of Saint-Saens’ “The Carnival of the Animals.” We do not know if he ever wrote about the Athenaeum, but we do know that he was a Proprietor (share #62) who was a frequent visitor while summering at his residence at 9 Atlantic Avenue in North Hampton.

Nash was very popular from the early 1930s to his death, with his work finding print in *The New Yorker* and *The Saturday Evening Post*, among many others. An example of his nonsensical but clever rhyming: “The one-L lama, he’s a priest. The two-L llama, he’s a beast. And I will bet a silk pajama: there isn’t any three-L llama.”

And one more: “To keep your marriage brimming, With love in the loving cup, Whenever you’re wrong, admit it; Whenever you’re right, shut up.”

SEEN ON SOCIAL MEDIA: The Meserve-Webster House

By JAMES SMITH, *Photographic Collections Manager*

BUILT C. 1760 by Michael Whidden, this house was originally occupied by George Meserve who was appointed by the Crown as tax collector. Over the Stamp Act of 1765, he was burned in effigy by the town citizens, and while in Boston, he resigned from his post before returning to Portsmouth. In 1808, statesman Daniel Webster resided here until he purchased a residence on the corner of Court and Pleasant streets.

The Meserve-Webster House stood in the North End on the corner of Vaughan and School streets. Vaughan was the only thoroughfare north from downtown Portsmouth until about 50 years ago.

In this prime location, the Meserve-Webster House was converted between 1910 to 1920 into a commercial building with multiple storefronts.

By the time of this photo, in 1959, the building appeared vacant with Beatty & Cole Circus posters in all the windows. One of the storefronts still had the sign of its past tenant: the Roma Café, operated by Frank Scarito.

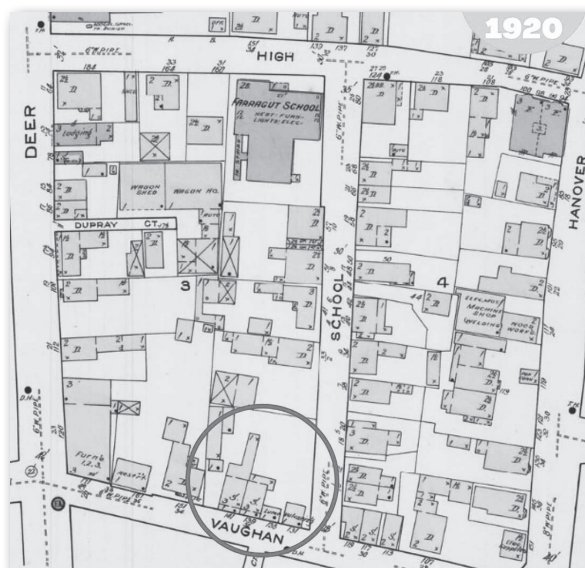
During the 1960s, the Meserve-Webster House was in poor condition and due to its prominent location, the building was cited an eyesore and an example of urban



Today, the Meserve-Webster house would be approximately across the street from Dos Amigos on Portwalk Place.

PORTSMOUTH ATHENAEUM IMAGE

This 1920 map shows the location of the Meserve-Webster house at the corner of Vaughan and School streets between Deer and Hanover.



PORTSMOUTH
ATHENAEUM
IMAGE

blight in the North End. The house and nearly the entire North End neighborhood were demolished during the Vaughan Street Urban Renewal Project, c. 1968-1972.

Once the major thoroughfare, Vaughan Street was fragmented to the pedestrian-friendly Vaughan Mall in the south and a side street in the north.

Replacing Vaughan were two thoroughfares that now extended directly into the downtown from the north: Maplewood Avenue and Market Street. These new roads correlated with the completion of the I-95 Piscataqua River Bridge.

The photograph was snapped by Howard T. Oedel and comes from his 1960-dissertation "Portsmouth, New Hampshire: The Role of the Provincial Capital in the Development."

Athenaeum annual report now available online

The Portsmouth Athenaeum Annual Report 2020 is now available.

While 2020 was a challenging year, the annual report shows that we still accomplished so much to keep our organization moving forward.

Keeper Tom Hardiman and President Brad Lown share their inspiring addresses given at the 202nd annual meeting held in January.

Twelve committees, made up of volunteer Proprietors who help keep the Athenaeum functioning, report on their activities from the year.

The dedicated staff ensured that members, friends, and researchers stayed informed through their research articles, book reviews, weekly e-newsletters, and social media posts.

Also included are programming achievements, financial statements, and gift acknowledgements featuring the bequest of Charles DeGrandpre, and we remember those who passed away. Read the full report at www.portsmouthathenaeum.org.

HAPPY READING!

By KATY STERNBERGER, *Research Librarian*

Circulation has remained strong despite the coronavirus pandemic, and we continue to order exciting new books for our avid readers.

Since we haven't seen one another in a while, it seems an apt time to talk about borrowing and returning the Athenaeum's circulating materials.

To check in or check out a book, use the circulation sheets in the Reading Room (first floor) or the Library Room (third floor). We know you're eager to bring your books home, but please remember to write legibly.

First, put the date that you are checking in or checking out books, followed by your name. It is helpful to include your first initial with your last name, as some of our members have the same surname.

Next, write down the five-digit accession number, which is found on the bookplate, generally located on the inside front cover of the book.

Finally, don't forget to circle either "borrowing" or "returning."

Note that the Athenaeum is no longer quarantining books due to the pandemic.

Whether you are a new member who is checking out a book for the first time or you simply would like a refresher, feel free to reach out to Athenaeum staff.

GEORGIAN GARDENS

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

A survey by the Bibliotheque Nationale de France found only 25 copies of the book in public collections throughout the world. For perspective, there are nearly twice as many Gutenberg Bibles in public collections.

The Athenaeum acquired nine volumes of the work as part of a collection inherited by Thomas Hinkle from his aunt, Constance E. Peters, a MIT-trained architect and landscape architect who studied there with Ralph Adams Cram. She then formed a partnership with Elizabeth Greenleaf Pattee, also a MIT graduate, in offices at 23 West Cedar St. in Boston. The firm continued until Peters retired due to poor health in 1944.

Elizabeth Pattee continued to practice in Lincoln, Mass., and later became a professor at Rhode Island School of Design.

An additional volume of "Jardins Anglo-Chinois" and a number of related 18th-century books on garden and farm architecture were donated in memory of the late Arthur Gerrier.

The exhibit will show several plans for Georgian-period gardens in Portsmouth that reflect some of the ideas promoted in these books, though executed on a smaller scale.

Some, like Gov. John Wentworth and Col. George Boyd, went to great expense to bring gardeners directly from Britain. Others simply followed the recommendations published in books and shown in prints.



Barrett Wendell sits in the garden of his family home on Pleasant Street. A number of Portsmouth gardens will be featured in the Athenaeum exhibit, "The Georgian Garden in Print and in Portsmouth, 1714-1830."

PORTSMOUTH ATHENAEUM IMAGE

VARTAN GREGORIAN

A great library advocate

By DON MARGESON, *Publications Committee*

ON APRIL 17, two days after his death at 87, The New York Times published its obituary for Vartan Gregorian; the obituary started on the front page. Dr. Gregorian was an immigrant to the United States who became an illustrious academic, university administrator and civic leader.

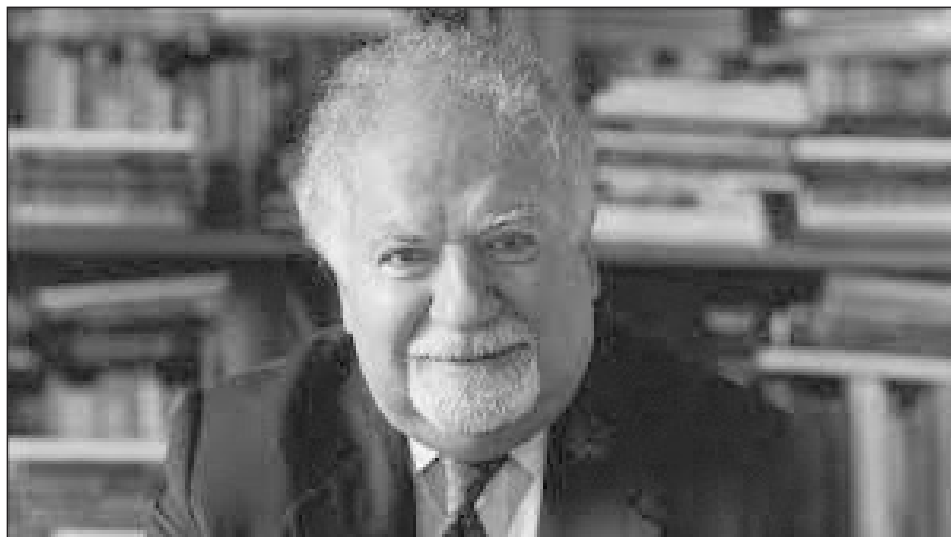
Born in 1934 in Tabriz, Persia (now Iran), he left for the U.S. in 1956, winning a scholarship to Stanford University and graduating two years later with honors.

He earned a dual doctorate in history and the humanities from Stanford in 1964 and began teaching college, first in the American West and then, in 1972, at the University of Pennsylvania. He became an academic dean at Penn in 1974 and its provost in 1978.

Later, as 16th president of Brown University (1989-97), Dr. Gregorian strengthened the school's academic reputation, hiring 270 new faculty members, expanding the school library, establishing 11 new departments, and more than doubling the university's endowment.

But it was not in academia that Dr. Gregorian achieved his greatest eminence as (in the Times' wording) an institutional "savior." Rather, it was during an eight-year "sabbatical" between his positions at the two Ivies, when he served as president and chief executive officer of the New York Public Library.

In 1981, the Library had "7.7 million books (the world's sixth largest collection) . . . gathering dust on its 88 linear miles of stacks." Its 1911 marble Beaux-Arts headquarters in Midtown was begrimed on the outside (with dealers and pimps lurking next door in Bryant Park) and poorly maintained within. The library had cut its hours, closing the headquarters on Thursdays and some satellite branches almost completely. The heart of the problem was financial: After its near-bankruptcy in the 1970s, the city had cut its funding of the library, seeing



The New York Times credits Vartan Gregorian with saving the New York Public Library.

it as a "dispensable frivolity." The library faced a \$50 million deficit.

In his employment interview with the Library's trustees, Dr. Gregorian passionately articulated the place of the library in a civilized and humanistic society: "The New York Public Library is a New York and national treasure. The branch libraries have made lives and saved lives. The . . . library is not a luxury. It is an integral part of New York's social fabric, its culture, its institutions, its media and its scholarly, artistic and ethnic communities. It deserves the city's respect, appreciation and support. No, the Library is not a cost center! It is an investment in the city's past and future!"

Once hired, Dr. Gregorian joined with the incoming board chair and vice chair, both prominent business executives, in direct solicitation of contributions from their friends in the corporate world. He and the philanthropic socialite Brooke Astor held and attended fund-raising parties, charity balls and other events.

Dr. Gregorian later acknowledged the work of these allies, writing that "they helped me make the case for the New York Public Library, making it a civic project that was both honorable and

glamorous." He also engaged the support of political leaders, including then-Mayor Ed Koch as well as the appropriators on the City Council and Board of Estimate.

Through Dr. Gregorian's efforts, both as fund-raiser and administrator, the New York Public Library was indeed saved. Hours of operation were restored; air conditioning and temperature controls were installed; the books and stacks were dusted and the headquarters' exterior was cleaned; exhibition, lecture and concert programs were instituted; and the resulting increase in patronage at the Main Branch gradually displaced the undesirable population occupying Bryant Park.

Over the course of his presidency, Dr. Gregorian raised a reported \$327 million from public and private sources for the New York Public Library.

But also of lasting note was his ringing advocacy of that institution, and of libraries in general. Former New York Mayor Robert F. Wagner, Jr., recognized this in saying of him that "he reminded us that libraries were engines of hope that move people into the middle class and to worlds beyond themselves."

LINCOLN COLLECTION GIFTED TO ATHENAEUM

By SHERRY WOOD

Photographer J.D. Lincoln recently gifted a collection of his work to the Portsmouth Athenaeum.

Proprietor and photographer Peter Randall, for whom the Randall Gallery is named, was instrumental in procuring this important donation.

"Lincoln photographed Portsmouth in the 1970s as the city was beginning to change," Randall said.

"His images, especially of Prescott Park children's programs, showed Portsmouth when it was primarily a 'locals' community and not the present tourist destination. Unlike many folks who primarily photograph buildings or landscape, Lincoln photographed people playing, celebrating, and enjoying the city."

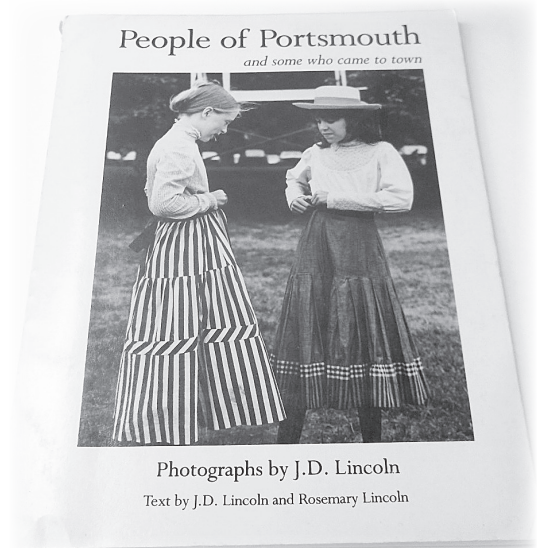
His seminal work may have been the book "People of Portsmouth," which

was published by Randall in 1982.

It is described on the New Hampshire State Library website as a "photographic record of political and social events in Portsmouth, N.H. from 1970 to 1980. Photographs include President Jimmy Carter addressing a town meeting; people enjoying the Prescott Park Art Festival; and the visit of Prince Charles on the occasion of the city's 350th birthday celebration."

Athenaeum Photographic Collections Manager James Smith said the book will serve as a template in cataloging the collection.

"It's amazing to see how much Portsmouth has changed in the last 50 years," Smith said. "Lincoln's work from about 1970-1980 fills in a major puzzle piece in preserving recent



Portsmouth history, as the 1970s seems to be a convergence of old and new Portsmouth."

Anyone who would like to make a donation for archival supplies for the project can go to <https://portsmouthathenaeum.org/donate/>. Please put "Lincoln Photograph Project" in the notes. Checks may be made out to the Portsmouth Athenaeum with "Lincoln Photograph Project" in the memo line.

LOVECRAFT IN THE READING ROOM

By SHERRY WOOD



Horror/science-fiction writer H.P. Lovecraft (1890-1937) visited the Athenaeum in September 1923.

WIKICOMMONS

Horror/sci-fi writer H.P. Lovecraft (1890-1937) was known as a prolific letter writer, and on Sept. 4, 1923 he penned a letter to friend Frank Belknap Long telling of his visit to the Portsmouth Athenaeum.

"When I had made my purchases, I repair'd to the venerable Athenaeum, where in a panell'd room behind a Colonial door I writ postcards and gaz'd up at the portraitures of colonial dignitaries, and at the fram'd commission of Gov. Wentworth, with the royal seal and the stamp put on in accordance with the Stamp Act.

"God Save the King! What a surge of loyal sentiment ingulph'd me, when I beheld the likenesses, full of manly dignity, of Gen. Sir W. Pepperrell (born just across the harbour in Kittery); Sir Ch. Knowles; Vice-Admiral Sir Peter Warren; and Sir Rich Spry, all he-

roes in that glorious taking of Louisbourg, in 1745, from the French king."

Warren, Knowles and Spry sat for portraits in the Boston studio of painter John Smibert, and their portraits still grace the Reading Room of the Athenaeum today.

The Athenaeum learned of this letter when Lovecraft historian Donovan K. Loucks contacted Athenaeum Librarian Robin Silva with a number of research queries.

In an email to Robin on Aug. 13, 2018, Loucks quoted the letter referencing the Athenaeum and also listed many other historic Portsmouth locations Lovecraft, a Rhode Islander by birth, visited and mentioned.

Lovecraft's 1923 visit to the Reading Room came within two weeks of the city's celebration of its 300th anniversary with the four-day extravaganza "The Pageant of Portsmouth."



Please join us for
The *Twenty-eighth* Annual
Portsmouth Athenæum Pot-Luck Picnic



The Seacoast Science Center
Odiorne Point State Park, Rye, NH
Tuesday, August 31, 2021 at 5:00 pm
(In the tent, rain or shine!)

Bring a dish to share, in single servings if possible, by last name:

A-C:	Appetizer
D-H:	Salad
I-M:	Dessert
N-S	Main Dish
T-Z:	Main Dish

Or bring your own and enjoy the company and the scenery!

Wine, beer, water, and punch are provided!

No RSVP - just come!

And please encourage a fellow Proprietor, Subscriber, or Friend to join you!

Any questions? Call : Cindy Knapp 603 436 8748 or Tom Hardiman 603 431 2538

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Athenaeum Music

CHAMBER MUSIC SERIES RETURNS;
MEMORIAL CONCERT SCHEDULED

The Portsmouth Athenaeum Chamber Music series resumes this fall with two concerts:

- Neave Trio (piano, violin, cello), Sunday, Oct. 10, 3 p.m., St. John's Episcopal Church, Portsmouth.
- Noree Chamber Soloists, Sunday, Oct. 24, 3 p.m., St. John's Episcopal Church.

"We are excited that once again, music will fill the air and our audience can hear the musicians in person after a very long year," Performance Committee member Sally Gayer said. "We will take the usual COVID precautions -- masks for those who have not been vaccinated; no masks necessary for the vaccinated and we will observe social distancing as much as possible."

Patron sponsorship is \$150 per person (includes tickets to concerts and a post-concert reception). Regular tickets are \$25 at the door.



The Memorial Concert in honor of those Athenaeum members who died in 2020 will be on Sunday, Nov. 14, at 3 p.m., with Peter Sykes playing the harpsichord at the North Church on Market Square.

There is no charge for this concert.



The Neave Trio (piano, violin, cello) will perform Sunday, Oct. 10, 3 p.m., at St. John's Episcopal Church in Portsmouth as part of the Athenaeum's Chamber Music Series.

JACOB LEWIS LOVENDAHL