AN ISLAND ODYSSEY
How the Athenaeum helped Life Saving Station gain historic status

By SHERRY WOOD | Publications Committee

A DOCUMENT sitting for years in the Portsmouth Athenaeum’s Research Library helped Wood Island Life Saving Station in its quest to be designated for the National Register of Historic Places.

“That building had been rejected for the national register twice, in the 1980s and 1990s. So it was quite a mountain to climb,” said Sam Reid, an Athenaeum Proprietor and president of the Wood Island Life Saving Station Association since the nonprofit’s founding in 2011. Eugene “Wick” York, now a preservation specialist based in Connecticut, wrote a description of U.S. government architectural plans for life saving stations and how they developed.


“I gave it to the Athenaeum because he covered so much of those in the Piscataqua,” Candee said of York’s life-saving station research. “Just the sort of info impossible on such a small island.”

Sam Reid eventually needed.”

Reid hired York in 2014 and the researcher successfully made the case to the state of Maine for the station’s

CONTINUED ON PAGE 7
Thankful For Our Volunteers
Profile: Joan Hammond
By DON MARGESON

Her own family includes a number of people notable in the annals of the Seacoast area. One was Capt. Walter Neale, who during the 1630s lived in New Castle as an agent of both Capt. John Mason and Sir Ferdinando Gorges, joint holder of royal patents to the land between the Merrimack and Sagadahoc (now Kennebec) rivers. Another was John Amazeen (b. early 1630s), founder of a New Castle family whose descendants live there today. Yet another was John Bowles (1765-1837), a Portsmouth ship captain who assisted Martha Washington’s slave Ona Judge in her escape to Portsmouth in 1797. Working with Athenaeum Librarian Robin Silva three hours a week, Joan transcribes handwritten manuscripts and other original documents for incorporation into the Athenaeum’s online catalog.

She has transcribed diaries, one covering 1838-66 kept by Jesse Walker, a farmer in Rye and Portsmouth Naval Shipyard worker. Another diary was kept by Joshua Banfield of Portsmouth, who was involved in the activities of various local churches. She’s also transcribed in spreadsheet format the business records of local firms, such as the Appleford Hotel’s guest register.

Lecture Committee on the Lookout
By DON MARGESON | Lecture Committee

The Lecture Committee is the working group annually responsible for planning and presenting a series of five or six lectures under the Athenaeum’s sponsorship. Each year, the committee chooses a theme for that year’s series, selects lecture topics around that theme, schedules their once-a-month presentation, recruits lecture presenters, arranges publicity for the lectures, sets up the lecture site (traditionally the Research Library), and assists the presenters with any equipment they require.

One current volunteer is Proprietor and Portsmouth native Joan Hammond. Her mother, Elizabeth Neal Rylander, was a native of New Castle and met Joan’s father-to-be when he was stationed in the area as a member of the U.S. Army’s 22nd Coastal Artillery engaged in the Harbor Defense of Portsmouth during World War II.

Joan grew up in Massachusetts and married Glenn Hammond, a Massachusetts native. The couple moved to New York State, where Joan became a librarian, mostly in public school libraries but also at a college library. She enjoyed the occupation for the opportunity it gave her to engage in research and to assist others’ research efforts. She retired in 2003; she and Glenn now live in Portsmouth. Joan became a Friend of the Athenaeum in 2014, a Subscriber in May 2018, and a Proprietor in January of this year. Her mother had also been a Proprietor. Joan was drawn to the Athenaeum, not only by her connection through her mother, but also by her fascination with history, which she finds a source of inspiration and wisdom.

In September of 1955, insurance agent Reginald Kennard (1890-1965) was also a former city councilman (1928-1929) who suffered a heart attack and died a week later at the age of 51. The family is buried at Temple Israel Cemetery. In the summer of 1955, insurance agent Reginald F. Kennard (1890-1965) was contracted by the Portsmouth Housing Authority to determine the value and condition of properties in the South End for urban renewal.

On the right is the former Black’s grocery store and apartments, and at center is the current home of the Gundalow Company. The building owned by the Black family on Marcy (formerly Water) Street was demolished and now is the site of community gardens within the Strawberry Banke Museum grounds. (Parcel A) and along Gates and Hancock streets (Parcel B).

On Sept. 28, 1955, Reginald Kennard submitted his final report on the South End Urban Redevelopment Project, forever changing the South End landscape, more specifically the Puddle Dock neighborhood (now Strawbery Banke Museum). In the Athenaeum’s online catalog, you can learn more about the South End Redevelopment Project and specifically buildings and reports in Parcel A.

The building owned by the Black family on Marcy (formerly Water) Street was eventually demolished and now is the site of community gardens within the museum grounds.
MOTEL ORANGE HEADSTAGES

Stephanie Rohwer Hewson has spent the last 15 years working in the museum field in the Seacoast area. Some may know her from her long tenure at the Moffatt-Ladd House and Garden. Hewson, who has visited the Athenaeum over the years for research, lectures and exhibits, developed a strong affinity for the organization and its collection and buildings.

She said for many years she had wanted to be more involved, either as a volunteer or in a more professional capacity, but the timing was never right. When she heard the position had been created for many years she had wanted to be more involved, either as a volunteer or in a more professional capacity, but the timing was never right. When she heard the position had been created, she was eager to have the chance to apply.

“T’m grateful for the opportunity to join the staff and have been enjoying learning the organization and all who are involved,” she wrote in an email.

She hopes to continue to meet as many members as possible. Hewson coordinated programs and visitor services at the American Independence Museum in Exeter, where one aspect of her duties was to work with volunteers. She gained an incredible appreciation for those who volunteer their time to make their communities a better place.

She also planned and facilitated the museum’s public and school programs, and ran the annual American Independence Festival for five years.

She has worked at the Moffatt-Ladd House and Garden since 2005, serving in almost every capacity -- from guiding, to planning events, to serving as the director’s assistant and the museum’s bookkeeper, and now as the museum’s house manager.

“I live in Dover with my incredibly supportive husband of 11 years, Kevin, our funny and clever 2-year-old son, Owen, and an energetic border collie named Murray,” she said.

Hewson is at the Athenaeum on Mondays and occasionally other weekdays as she’s splitting her time between the Athenaeum, the Moffatt-Ladd House, and being a mom.

She can be reached via email at shewson@portsmouthathenaeum.org.

ASISTANT LIBRARIAN and Cataloger June (Seymour) Spezzano hit the ground running, and is currently going through six crates of information given to the Athenaeum on New Hampshire Civil War veterans in Company G, 10th Infantry.

“T’m going through those and pulling out genealogy info, creating/updating bios at the Athenaeum and updating findagrave memorials,” she wrote in an email.

Spezzano has volunteered at findagrave (a website owned by Ancestry.com) since 2008. She has also photographed headstones (23,000 and counting) to upload into findagrave.

Her work with the Portsmouth Public Library Cemetery Index led to the creation of a full map of South Cemetery that can be viewed online.

“Using Ancestry.com, family search and genealogy bank, I am continuously updating memorials - linking to spouse(s), adding maiden name, linking to parents, etc.,” she said.

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She graduated from the University of Southern Maine with a computer science degree and worked at Liberty Mutual from 1985-1999. She later worked as a paraprofessional at Portsmouth’s Little Harbour School from 2004 to 2020.

Spezzano has known Athenaeum Librarian Robin Silva for 20 years; they first met at a Little Harbour School fundraiser when Spezzano was serving as treasurer of the school’s PTA.

“Robin and I would sometimes email via the Athenaeum regarding local genealogy,” Spezzano said. “This year Robin called and told me about the new position of assistant librarian and cataloguer.”

Spezzano said one of the more colorful Civil War veterans she has encountered in her Athenaeum research is Otis Hewins (1826-1873), who in civilian life was a bartender at McClellan House in Kingston and worked as a shoemaker. Hewins was married three times and is buried in Portsmouth’s Harmony Grove Cemetery.

She can be reached at jspezzano@portsmouthathenaeum.org.

June Seymour Spezzano

JUNE SEYmour SPEZZANO

Thankful for our Volunteers

By Cindy Knapp | Social Committee

DO YOU WANT to meet other members at the Portsmouth Athenaeum? Enjoy social situations, and can spare an hour or two a month?

Then, you might want to consider joining the Social Committee.

Being on the Social Committee offers individuals the opportunity to meet other members, and to learn more about the organization, itself. You’ll enjoy being a part of a committee that is open to new ideas and encourages participation.

The annual Holiday Party is coming up, on Friday, Dec 2. We’ll be decorating the halls on the day before the party and are always looking for helpers! It’s a special opportunity to meet the staff, and some of the Social Committee, too.

Please feel free to contact Cindy Knapp, Social Committee Chairman, at musician619@usa.net, with any questions or if you are interested in joining this active committee.

Thank you for your volunteerism and dedication.

Cindy Knapp

Volunteer Coordinator

Honored at the Athenaeum’s 29th annual picnic on Aug. 30 were Bud and Lois DesRochers, who have transported the tables and chairs to and from the picnic for the past 15 years. Bud and Lois are moving to Florida, so thank you and bon voyage.

Diners dig into the potluck offerings at the annual Athenaeum picnic, held this year at Rye Harbor State Park.

Social Committee Chairman Cindy Knapp does her best to keep the tablecloths from blowing away at the Athenaeum picnic.

Thank you for your volunteerism and dedication.

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IN NEED OF BREATHING SPACE

The Athenaeum has long been plagued by a lack of adequate storage space for its collections. As far back as 1871 the directors voted to negotiate with neighboring owners to rent or buy space to accommodate its burgeoning book holdings, but nothing seems to have come from that initiative. (At that time, and until the acquisition of the Foye Building in 1982, the 1805 building was the only place for collections storage.)

Large donations of books in the last decades of the 1800s imposed strains that were addressed with limited success through the acquisition of more bookcases and deaccessions. About 3,700 volumes were acquired from the Tredick and Woodbury estates, books which are now housed in the handsome alcoves in the Library Room. Robert Eddy, cousin of Fitz John Porter (whose statue can be seen in Haven Park on Pleasant Street), in 1891 donated nine cases of law books, a donation which may well have been greeted by the directors with mixed enthusiasm.

Athenaeum files record several book sales between 1870 and 1918. Large donations of books came in during the late 1800s. About 3,700 volumes from the Tredick and Woodbury estates are housed in alcoves in the Library Room.

A long period of institutional atrophy beginning about 1910 and lasting into the early 1950s resulted in an inadvertent easing of the storage issue, as book acquisitions fell off dramatically. For instance, the book budget for 1941 was $125, and as late as 1954 only $66 was spent on acquisitions. The establishment of a Library Committee in the 1950s resulted in a very rigorous and arguably rash effort to address the storage problem through the sale and occasional gift of books that were deemed surplus, irrelevant, or simply not there any more.

In 1956 about 1,500 books were deaccessioned for $89. In ensuing years the committee unwisely purged the shelves of many valuable holdings, books such as John J. Audubon’s Birds of America (netting $2,500) in order to make space for new acquisitions that were perceived to be of more interest to modern readers.

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IT’S TIME TO SHOW YOUR ARTISTIC SIDE

By JUDY GROPPA | Exhibits Committee

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As part of the Proprietors Art Show, Athenaeum Librarian Robin Silva creates a display of all the published works by Proprietors from the previous year. Check with Robin to see if she has your work.

The show remains on display in the Randall Gallery until the Jan. 14 annual meeting. Works can be picked up then.

A group of Athenaeum members climbs the gangway to the Wood Island Life Saving Station during a tour in August.

WOODBURY LIBRARY

Wood Island Station will be the only one in our area open to the public as a museum,” he said.

The stations were set up to assist and provide shore rescue to disabled ships, and the bravery of the “surfmen” who took on this dangerous task is legendary. The Life-Saving Service was absorbed by the U.S. Coast Guard in 1915.

“Yet, it’s one thing to save people’s lives, but it’s another thing to risk your life to do it,” Reid said of the surfmen. “Honoring them is what it’s all about.”

On Sept. 30, the lovingly restored 1930s Coast Guard rescue craft the Mervin Roberts was launched from the town dock in Kittery Point, rowed to the island and pulled up the restored marine railway on a historic cradle.

With exterior work nearly complete, along with restoration of two huge sea walls and construction of a pier to access the island, some interior work remains to be done — finishing floors, painting stairs, and the last of the utilities.

Though the town of Kittery has owned the island since 1973 (a copy of the quitclaim deed from the U.S. government is in the Athenaeum archives), all of the restoration has been paid for privately, and through state and federal grants.

Reid plans to update Athenaeum members on the island in presentations in January.

For more information or to donate to the restoration effort, go to woodislandlifesaving.org. Checks can be made payable to the Wood Island Life Saving Station Association, P.O. Box 11, Kittery Point, Maine, 03905.

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An excellent scholar, Jane was always
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Jane, who died July 18 at 91, pored over
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No slave to fashion, Jane’s wardrobe
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always come up with it.

Jane’s parents neglected to give her a
middle name. When she became aware
that most of her school chums had such
she decided she would give herself one.
Daffodil. She loved it, and if her school-
mates called her Daffy, so be it. That was
fine, too.

In the parlance of her lobstermen neigh-
bors at her summer home in Machias-
port, Maine, Jane was truly a keeper. She
will be greatly missed.

Proprietor Deborah Child, who threw
Jane a “hat party” when she retired in
2000, described Porter as leaving “a
gaping hole for those of us who had the
privilege of knowing her not only as the
keeper of the Portsmouth Athenaeum,
but personally.”

“Intimidating at times, she was also a
tremendous wit,” Child wrote in an
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REMEMBERING JANE PORTER

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NEWSPAPER

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ANCARA

Continued from Page 4

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**CONSPESSIONS OF A GALLERY SITTER**

**By Sherry Wood**

I **HAVE OFTEN** sat in the corner of the Randall Gallery, typing away on a laptop, when some brave soul who climbed 32 steps from Market Square stumbles in, breathing heavily. The cardiovascular effort alone merits an encouraging greeting. Many gallery visitors are from “away,” though about half are Seacoast residents who say, “I’ve always wondered what this place is.”

Seeing the Athenaeum through their eyes is re-energizing, and can lead to a great conversation. It’s also fun to see the exhibit yourself. Athenaeum exhibits often focus on people or things or events of significance that would otherwise have gone unnoticed. Think of that line in Thomas Gray’s *Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard*: “Full many a flower is born to blush unseen.”

Not if it’s in the Randall Gallery. So please consider the pleasure of presenting to the modern eye looks more like a candle bobeche than a globe holder. “We have a great crew of volunteers, but would like to grow our group,” Tom Hardiman said.

**LET THERE BE LIGHT**

**By Sherry Wood**

I **T TOOK** Proprietor Jeffrey Hopper 10 years to find glass globes for the brass “gasoiler” in the second-floor Reading Room, but it was worth the wait. “It always looked forlorn hanging without its shades,” Hopper wrote in an email. “The globe opening was the clue. The older examples have a smaller opening, roughly 2 and 5/8 inch. The receiver for the globes is also tiny and to the modern eye looks more like a candle bobeche than a globe holder.”

The fact he was never able to find a photo of the original fixture made the search more difficult. “I couldn’t find an original manufacturer,” Hopper said. “I assumed based on style either Cornelius & Baker of Philadelphia, or more likely Henry Hooper of Boston.”

The Rev. Charles Burroughs, Athenaeum president, presented the library and museum with the gas chandelier (gasolier) in 1861 by Athenaeum President Rev. Charles Burroughs is no longer “globe-less,” thanks to Proprietor Jeffrey Hopper.

PHOTO BY JAMES SMITH

**ARCANA**

**Continued From Page 4**

**Remembering Jane Porter**

A

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The Keeper’s filing system was perhaps somewhat enigmatic, but if you expand upon it. Jane’s parents neglected to give her a middle name. When she became aware that most of her school chums had such she decided she would give herself one. Daffodil. She loved it, and if her schoolmates called her Daffy, so be it. That was fine, too.

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Proprietor Deborah Child, who threw Jane a “hat party” when she retired in 2000, described Porter as leaving “a gaping hole for those of us who had the privilege of knowing her not only as the keeper of the Portsmouth Athenaeum, but personally.”

“Intimidating at times, she was also a tremendous wit,” Child wrote in an email. “I can still hear her laughter at her retirement party when we all donned funny hats and feasted on Jane’s idea of fine dining ---a cold beer and a Moe’s sandwich. It was a truly grand occasion and bittersweet at best.”

Jane Porter is pictured in November 1995 during the “breakthrough” between the Athenaeum Research Library and what would become the Randall Gallery.

 przec mourned by the membership, and those of the general public.

Jane, who died July 18 at 91, pored over writing the Athenaeum newsletter, crafting every word, and she was a wonderful writer. She also made sure it included something that made her laugh. No slave to fashion, Jane’s wardrobe was predictable. She called herself “Two Pants Porter” because she felt no need to expand upon it.

Jane's taste in music ran from Brahms and Mahler’s 2nd Symphony to Bluegrass and Alison Krauss, fiddle, banjo, and dobro. She was an early and enthusiastic supporter of the Athenaeum’s readings and musical performances.

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Jane Porter is pictured in November 1995 during the “breakthrough” between the Athenaeum Research Library and what would become the Randall Gallery.

needed something you could be sure that it was in there somewhere. Jane could always come up with it.

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Jane Porter is pictured in November 1995 during the “breakthrough” between the Athenaeum Research Library and what would become the Randall Gallery.

was received suggesting that the floor loading in the Foye Building was excessive and needed to be relieved through the removal of about half the volumes in that building.

A hasty relocation of the books (and many old newspapers) to a North Hampton storage facility offered only a short-lived solution, as the owner of the facility terminated the lease agreement earlier this year.

The materials were relocated to property almost contiguous to the Athenaeum, thanks to the generosity of Proprietor Mark McNab, who has granted free use of it for an indeterminate period.

Recognizing that a longer-term arrangement must eventually be found, a search committee is now evaluating several possible long-term storage options. Given the cost and difficulty in finding space that meets the Athenaeum’s unique needs, this is not a problem that lends itself to easy solutions.

**PORTSMOUTH ATHENAEUM NEWSLETTER**

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Six of the Athenaeum’s physical space has expanded dramatically in recent decades, storage problems persist unabated. The solution to ameliorate storage problems. Such unfortunate disposal of valuable assets is unlikely to occur again. Nevertheless, it would seem that deaccessioning policies currently in effect should be reviewed and possibly expanded if they can help to ameliorate storage problems.

While the Athenaeum’s physical space has expanded dramatically in recent decades, storage problems persist unabated. The concerns heightened dramatically in August 2019, when a structural engineer’s opinion
IN NEED OF BREATHING SPACE

The Athenaeum has long been plagued by a lack of adequate storage space for its collections. As far back as 1871 the directors voted to negotiate with neighboring owners to rent or buy space to accommodate its burgeoning book holdings, but nothing seems to have come from that initiative.

(At that time, and until the acquisition of the Foye Building in 1882, the 1865 building was the only place for collections storage.)

Large donations of books in the last decades of the 1800s imposed strains that were addressed with limited success through the acquisition of more bookcases and deaccessions.

About 3,700 volumes were acquired from the Tredick and Woodbury estates, books which are now housed in the handsome alcoves in the Library Room. Robert Eddy, cousin of Fitz John Porter (whose statue can be seen in Haven Park on Pleasant Street), in 1891 donated nine cases of law books, a donation which may well have been greeted by the directors with mixed enthusiasm.

Athenaeum files record several book sales between 1870 and 1918.

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A long period of institutional atrophy beginning about 1910 and lasting into the early 1950s resulted in inadvertent easing of the storage issue, as book acquisitions fell off dramatically. For instance, the book budget for 1941 was $125, and as late as 1954 only $66 was spent on acquisitions.

The establishment of a Library Committee in the 1950s resulted in a very vigorous and arguably rash effort to address the storage problem through the sale and occasional gift of books that were deemed surplus, irrelevant, or simply unwanted.

In 1956 about 1,500 books were deaccessioned for $89. In ensuing years the committee unwisely purged the shelves of many valuable holdings, books such as John J. Audubon’s Birds of America (netting $2,500) in order to make space for new acquisitions that were perceived to be of more interest to modern readers.

In 1962, 28 rare books were sold to an Athenaeum Proprietor.

WOOD ISLAND

Continued from Page 1

IT’S TIME TO SHOW YOUR ARTISTIC SIDE

By JUDY GROPPA | Exhibits Committee

The Proprietors Art Show is scheduled to open on Friday, Dec. 2, as part of the annual holiday party at the Athenaeum. Proprietors, Subscribers, Friends and spouses/partners are invited to submit fine or decorative art, crafts, and published writings. Past shows have included paintings, photographs, sculpture, fiber works, jewelry, pottery and woodworking. We welcome both those who regularly participate and new contributors.

Items should be delivered to the Athenaeum by Nov. 26. Wall art should be ready for hanging. Please email Judy Groppa if you have questions (judygroppa@gmail.com).

As part of the Proprietors Art Show, Athenaeum Librarian Robin Silva creates a display of all the published works by Proprietors from the previous year. Check with Robin to see if she has your work.

The show remains on display in the Randall Gallery until the Jan. 14 annual meeting. Works can be picked up then.
MEET OUR NEW STAFF MEMBERS

Stephanie Rohwer Hewson

Volunteer and Outreach Coordinator Stephanie Rohwer Hewson has spent the last 15 years working in the museum field in the Seacoast area. Some may know her from her long tenure at the Moffatt-Ladd House and Garden. Hewson, who has visited the Athenaeum over the years for research, lectures and exhibits, developed a strong affinity for the organization and its collection and buildings.

She said for many years she had wanted to be more involved, either as a volunteer or in a more professional capacity, but the timing was never right. When she heard the position had been created, she was eager to have the chance to apply.

"I'm grateful for the opportunity to join the staff and have been enjoying learning the organization and all who are involved," she wrote in an email.

She hopes to continue to meet as many members as possible.

Hewson coordinated programs and visitor services at the American Independence Museum in Exeter, where one aspect of her duties was to work with volunteers. She gained an incredible appreciation for those who volunteer their time to make their communities a better place.

She also planned and facilitated the museum's public and school programs, museum's public and school programs, and ran the annual American Independence Festival for five years.

She has worked at the Moffatt-Ladd House and Garden since 2005, serving in almost every capacity -- from guiding, to planning events, to serving as the director's assistant and the museum's bookkeeper, and now as the museum's house manager.

"I live in Dover with my incredibly supportive husband of 11 years, Kevin, our funny and clever 2-year-old son, Owen, and an energetic border collie named Murray," she said.

Hewson is at the Athenaeum on Mondays and occasionally other weekdays as she splits her time between the Athenaeum, the Moffatt-Ladd House, and being a mom.

She can be reached via email at shewson@portsmouthathenaeum.org.

ASSISTANT LIBRARIAN and Cataloger June (Seymour) Spezzano hit the ground running, and is currently going through six crates of information given to the Athenaeum on New Hampshire Civil War veterans in Company G, 10th Infantry.

"I’m going through those and pulling out genealogy info, creating/updating bios at the Athenaeum and updating findagrave memorials," she wrote in an email.

Spezzano has volunteered at findagrave (a website owned by Ancestry.com) since 2008.

She used the bound cemetery books created by late Athenaeum Proprietor Louise Tallman to input more than 13,000 online Portsmouth memorials into findagrave.

She has also photographed headstones (23,000 and counting) to upload into findagrave.

Her work with the Portsmouth Public Library Cemetery Index led to the creation of a full map of South Cemetery that can be viewed online.

"Using Ancestry.com, family search and genealogy bank, I am continually updating memorials - linking to spouse(s), adding maiden name, linking to parents, etc.

She graduated from the University of Southern Maine with a computer science degree and worked at Liberty Mutual from 1985-1999. She later worked as a paraprofessional at Portsmouth's Little Harbour School from 2004 to 2020.

Spezzano has known Athenaeum Librarian Robin Silva for 20 years; they first met at a Little Harbour School fund-raiser when Spezzano was serving as treasurer of the school's PTA.

"Robin and I would sometimes email via the Athenaeum regarding local genealogy," Spezzano said. "This year Robin called and told me about the new position of assistant librarian and cataloguer."

Spezzano said one of the more colorful Civil War veterans she has encountered in her Athenaeum research is Otis Hewins (1826-1873), who in civilian life was a bartender at McClellan House in Kingston and worked as a shoemaker.

Hewins was married three times and is buried in Portsmouth's Harmony Grove Cemetery.

She can be reached at jspezzano@portsmouthathenaeum.org.

FEELING SOCIAL?

By CINDY KNAPP | Social Committee

Do you want to meet other members at the Portsmouth Athenaeum? Enjoy social situations, and can spare an hour or two a month?

Then, you might want to consider joining the Social Committee.

Being on the Social Committee offers individuals the opportunity to meet other members, and to learn more about the organization, itself. You’ll enjoy being a part of a committee that is open to new ideas and encourages participation.

The annual Holiday Party is coming up on Friday, Dec 2. We’ll be decorating the halls on the day before the party and are always looking for helpers! It’s a special opportunity to meet the staff, and some of the Social Committee, too.

Please feel free to contact Cindy Knapp, Social Committee Chairman, at musicmaker619@usa.net, with any questions or if you are interested in joining this active committee.

Thankful for Our Volunteers

Honored at the Athenaeum’s 29th annual picnic on Aug. 30 were Bud and Lois DesRochers, who have transported the tables and chairs to and from the picnic for the past 15 years. Bud and Lois are moving to Florida, so thank you and bon voyage.

PHOTO BY SHEERY WOOD

Social Committee Chairman Cindy Knapp does her best to keep the table-cloths from blowing away at the Athenaeum picnic.

PHOTO BY SHEERRY WOOD

Diners dig into the potluck offerings at the annual Athenaeum picnic, held this year at Rye Harbor State Park.

PHOTO BY SHEERY WOOD

PHOTO BY SHEERY WOOD
TO AN EXTENT REMARKABLE among nonprofit organizations in the Seacoast area, the Portsmouth Athenaeum is and always has been dependent upon volunteers to function and to carry out its mission. Only in recent years has the Athenaeum paid staff, for most of its 205-year existence, the organization has relied entirely on volunteers for both its management and its operations.

One current volunteer is Proprietor and Portsmouth native Joan Hammond. Her mother, Elizabeth Neal Rylander, was a native of New Castle and met Joan’s father-to-be when he was stationed in the area as a member of the U.S. Army’s 22nd Coastal Artillery engaged in the Harbor Defenses of Portsmouth during World War II.

Joan grew up in Massachusetts and married Glenn Hammond, a Massachusetts native. The couple moved to New York State, where Joan became a librarian, mostly in public school libraries but also at a college library. She enjoyed the occupation for the opportunity it gave her to engage in research and to assist others’ research efforts. She retired in 2003; she and Glenn now live in Portsmouth. Joan became a Friend of the Athenaeum in 2014, a Subscriber in May 2018, and a Proprietor in January of this year. Her mother had also been a Proprietor. Joan was drawn to the Athenaeum, not only by her connection through her mother, but also by her fascination with history, which she finds a source of inspiration and wisdom.

Her own family includes a number of people notable in the annals of the Seacoast area. One was Capt. Walter Neale, who during the 1630s lived in New Castle as an agent of both Capt. John Mason and Sir Ferdinando Gorges, joint holder of royal patents to the land between the Merrimack and Sagadahoc (now Kennebec) rivers. Another was John Amazeen (b. early 1600s), founder of a New Castle family whose descendants live there today. Yet another was John Bowles (1765-1837), a Portsmouth ship captain who assisted Martha Washington’s slave Ona Judge in her escape to Portsmouth in 1797.

Working with Athenaeum Librarian Robin Silva three hours a week, Joan transcribes handwritten manuscripts and other original documents for incorporation into the Athenaeum’s online catalog.

She has transcribed diaries, one covering 1838-66 kept by Jesse Walker, a farmer in Rye and Portsmouth Naval Shipyard worker. Another diary was kept by Joshua Banfield of Portsmouth, who was involved in the activities of various local churches. She’s also transcribed in spreadsheet format the business records of local firms, such as the Appleford Hotel’s guest register.

The Lecture Committee is the working group annually responsible for planning and presenting a series of five or six lectures under the Athenaeum’s sponsorship. Each year, the committee chooses a theme for that year’s series, selects lecture topics around that theme, schedules their once-a-month presentation, recruits lecture presenters, arranges publicity for the lectures, sets up the lecture site (traditionally the Research Library), and assists the presenters with any equipment they require.

The committee has openings in its membership for volunteers to join in carrying out its responsibilities. The sole membership requirement is a willing spirit. Naturally, it would be good to have persons with some interest in local history and culture, and even better if they know (or are!) people with expertise in topics under either of those headings, but those attributes are not essential.

On the technical side, we could use a person familiar with projecting and recording equipment to fill in if those who presently work with that equipment are ill or away. The annual hours of work are few — two or three one-hour planning meetings, plus at most 2.5 hours at each lecture, half spent in chairs listening to the lecturer. The duties are light, and the level of camaraderie is high.

If you are or might be interested in becoming a member of the Lecture Committee, please email the chair at donaldsmargeson@gmail.com.

H ere’s a view showing the intersection of Marcy and Jefferson streets in the summer of 1955. On the right is the former Black’s grocery store and apartments, and at center is the extant Jefferson House, home of the Gandalow Company and owned by Strawbery Banke Museum.

Samuel Black (abt 1875-1948) and his wife Sarah Farber Black (1873-1952) operated the corner grocery store and owned the building. Russian Jewish immigrants, the Blacks lived in Salem, Mass., before settling in Portsmouth, with Sam first arriving in 1910.

Members of Temple Israel, the couple raised four children in the Puddle Dock neighborhood. Their eldest son, Arthur Abraham Black, (1901-1953) followed the family business, operating Black’s Supermarket on Middle Street. Arthur was also a former city councilman (1928-1929) who suffered a heart attack and died a week later at the age of 51. The family is buried at Temple Israel Cemetery.

In the summer of 1955, insurance agent Reginald P. Kennard (1890-1965) was contracted by the Portsmouth Housing Authority to determine the value and condition of properties in the South End for urban renewal.

In the Athenaeum’s online catalog, you can learn more about the South End Redevelopment Project and specifically buildings and reports in Parcel A. The building owned by the Black family on Marcy (formerly Water) Street was eventually demolished and now is the site of community gardens within the Strawbery Banke Museum grounds.

On the right is the former Black’s grocery store and apartments, and at center is the current home of the Gandalow Company. The building owned by the Black family on Marcy (formerly Water) Street was demolished and now is the site of community gardens within the Strawbery Banke Museum grounds.
A DOCUMENT sitting for years in the Portsmouth Athenaeum’s Research Library helped Wood Island Life Saving Station in its quest to be designated for the National Register of Historic Places.

“That building had been rejected for the national register twice, in the 1980s and 1990s. So it was quite a mountain to climb,” said Sam Reid, an Athenaeum Proprietor and president of the Wood Island Life Saving Station Association since the nonprofit’s founding in 2011.


York graduated from the program in 1983.

“I gave it to the Athenaeum because he covered so much of those in the Piscataqua,” Candee said of York’s life-saving station research. “Just the sort of info impossible on such a small island.”

Sam Reid eventually needed.” Reid said the historic designation was “critical to allow the challenging restoration project to move ahead. Without it, the building would be required to come up to modern building codes, which was

CONTINUED ON PAGE 7

AN ISLAND ODYSSEY
How the Athenaeum helped Life Saving Station gain historic status

By SHERRY WOOD | Publications Committee

Athenaeum members listen to a presentation by Wood Island Life Saving Station Association President and Athenaeum Proprietor Sam Reid.

PHOTO BY JAMES SMITH