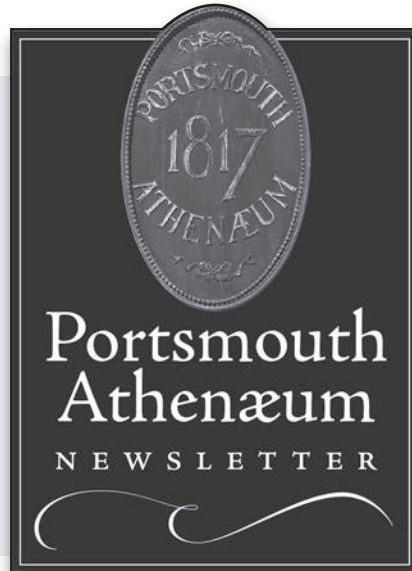


SUMMER 2025

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

THE PORTSMOUTH ATHENÆUM
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www.portsmouthathenæum.org



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ATHENÆUMS: WE ARE NOT ALONE

WHAT IS an Athenæum, and how many are in the United States?

The answers to these questions prove to be surprisingly elusive. In a recent article on the subject the Wall Street Journal states that “there are about twenty Athenæums in the United States.” Why the timid use of “about” in addressing the question?

Athenæum *Arcana*

By DICK ADAMS

The answer would seem to be that of the 18 membership libraries in the country, only nine call themselves Athenæums, and with few exceptions they do not entirely share common objectives and purposes.

Most dictionaries provide definitions of the term “Athenæum” along these lines: “Athenæums are membership libraries devoted to research and the promotion of learning.” This lofty goal describes many institutions that call themselves Athenæums, but by no means all.

The Pasadena (CA) Athenæum, for instance, serves as the faculty club for CalTech and is a private social club. Its online mission statement emphasizes its predominant function as a social club: “the Athenæum’s lovely building and



Portsmouth Athenæum staff (along with Portsmouth Public Library staffers) visited the Boston Athenæum to see how a fellow institution operates. From left, Office Manager Stephanie Tabit; Research Librarian Jessica Zaricki; Special Projects Librarian Susan Kindstedt; Portsmouth Public Library’s Katie Czajkowski and Nicole Luongo Cloutier; Outreach & Volunteer Coordinator Sharon Nichols, Librarian Robin Silva; and Assistant Librarian/Cataloger June Spezzano.

JAMES SMITH PHOTO

grounds offer members and their guests convenient settings for formal and informal dining, meetings, casual rendezvous, or private parties.”

Similarly, the La Jolla (CA) Athenæum is primarily a museum focusing on

music and art and makes no claim to promote general intellectual pursuits. Some Athenæums come closer to the common dictionary characterization than others, but a significant exception

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WALKING IN THE FOOTSTEPS OF A PATRIOT

By SHERRY WOOD

SOON AFTER George Washington was named commander of the Continental Army in 1775, Portsmouth's Jonathan Mitchel Sewall wrote the words to a song that would be sung in taverns and on battlegrounds during the Revolutionary War.

Sewall, the subject of an exhibit in the Athenaeum's Randall Gallery, opened his paean to Washington:

*Vain Britons, boast no longer with
proud indignity,*

*By land your conquering legions,
your matchless strength at sea,*

*Since we, your braver sons in-
censed, our swords have girded on,*

*Huzza, huzza, huzza, huzza, for
war and Washington.*

Nancy Hammond, curator of the exhibit "Portsmouth In the Age of Jonathan Mitchel Sewall, Poet, Lawyer, Patriot" starts with a description of the song in her book about Sewall (Peter E. Randall Publisher, 2022). She recounts how a British prisoner of war in Delaware complained of listening to his captors sing endless rounds of "War and Washington."

Sewall would have another chance to idolize his hero in 1789, writing three

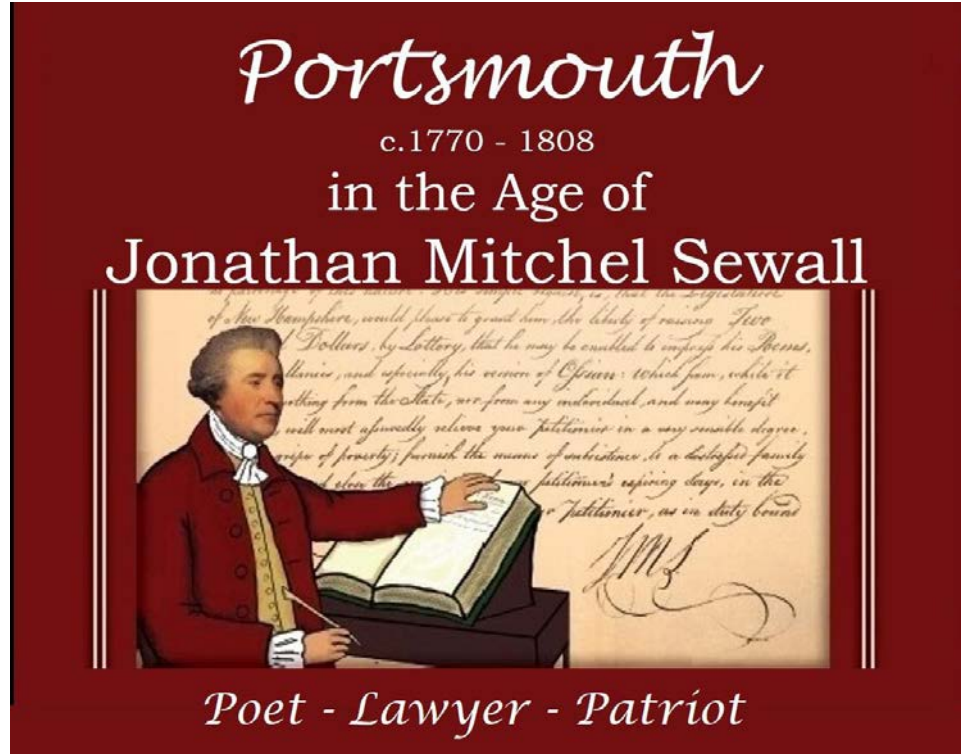
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"Portsmouth in the Age of Jonathan Mitchel Sewall" runs through Nov. 15 in the Randall Gallery.

odes for President Washington's visit to Portsmouth on Oct. 31. As the president stood on the balcony of the former State House on what is now Market Square, Sewall and two friends performed the three works, accompanied by a band.

Eleven years later, Sewall delivered a funeral oration for Washington on Dec. 31, 1799 "at the request of the inhabitants" of Portsmouth at Queen's Chapel (now St. John's Episcopal).

The poet-lawyer was known for writing epitaphs for the city's prominent citizens; many of those words can still be seen on stones in the North Cemetery.

Those citizens included Abraham Isaac, who owned The Golden Teapot shop at the corner of Penhallow and State streets, and Dr. Hall Jackson.

Hammond and her co-curators, Mike Dunbar and Ceal Anderson, have created a walking trail map that includes

those sites and many others, highlighting Portsmouth people whose lives Sewall touched.

The exhibit will also feature Sewall's writings — many located with the assistance of Librarian Robin Silva in the Athenaeum's collections — as well as the works of local students.

"The children were asked to write poems honoring someone they believe deserves to be remembered," Hammond said, noting that more than 100 poems were submitted by Little Harbour, New Franklin, and Dondero elementary schools.

The exhibit opened June 27 and runs through Nov. 15. It is open Tuesdays through Saturdays, 1-4 p.m.

Anyone wishing to volunteer to staff the gallery during visiting hours can contact Outreach and Volunteer Coordinator Sharon Nichols at snichols@portsmouthatheneum.org. ♣

LEARNING IN AND OUT OF THE CLASSROOM

LIBRARIAN **Robin Silva** supervised spring intern **Ben Fortin** from Great Bay Community College for several months.

The English major from York, Maine, is transferring to the University of New Hampshire to complete his bachelor's degree.

He completed four projects, including:

- S1458: Transcript for the record of the proceedings of John Bennett, Justice of the Peace, for the county of Rockingham in the state of New Hampshire, 1834-1866. It consists mostly of marriages and military oaths.
- S1791: Index for the ledger for the Portsmouth branch of the National Insurance Company kept by insurance agent Edward Payson Kimball, dated 1865 to 1872.

Lincoln in the library

Research Librarian **Jessica Zaricki** reports: Cataloging of ephemera from the Portsmouth Historical Society continues, as does the shelf-reading and collection shift in the fourth-floor gallery. The first part of the literature collection (P-PN) has been read and shifted and the difference is amazing!

In April, I took a trip to Portsmouth Middle School to share primary sources relating to Portsmouth's response to the Lincoln assassination in 1865. I worked in conjunction with the middle school librarian, **Tara Mikela**, to provide support for the seventh-grade English Language Arts students who read the book *Chasing Lincoln's Killer* by James L. Swanson.

Both faculty and students enjoyed the time we spent talking about primary sources and sharing photos, sermons, diaries, and other ephemera from the Athenaeum's collection.

Putting faces to names

Assistant Librarian/Cataloger **June Spezzano** continues to work on S0392, the Portsmouth High School roster for 1846-1915. She is about two-thirds of the



The name of Portsmouth Mayor Mary Dondero, shown in this 1940s photo, came up as Assistant Librarian/Cataloger June Spezzano continued her work on the Portsmouth High School roster for 1846 through 1915. ATHENAEUM COLLECTION

way through the list of 4,616 students. She researches each person to include birth and death information, and the names of their parents.

"Find-A-Grave has been an invaluable tool in finding these Portsmouth students," she said.

She has added nearly 22,000 memorials to the website.

Spezzano encouraged Proprietor **Joseph Hammond**, who is the descendent of one of the Portsmouth High School students, to add details and photos from his family on Find-A-Grave for John David Hammond (1887-1968).

Portsmouth's first female mayor was married to one of the students on the roster, Charles Anthony Dondero (1883-1944). He owned a fruit stand on Congress Street. Shortly after his death, Mary Ellen Carey Dondero (1894-1960) would be elected mayor; she was inaugurated on Jan. 1, 1945.

The Donderos' daughter, Eileen Dondero Foley (1918-2016) would go on to serve eight terms as Portsmouth's mayor.

Archives highlights

Archivist **Katy Sternberger** shared this selection of research materials in the Athenaeum's archives and special collections:

- **S1831: Miriam King Margeson scrapbook, circa 1943.** During her training for the United States Army Air Forces (predecessor to the United States Air Force), Margeson kept this binder with all of her class notes about the types of planes flown in the Portsmouth area during World War II. The scrapbook is arranged by each plane's alphanumeric designator and includes details about how to identify each of them. (*Gift of Jennifer Margeson Hull*)
- **S1832: New Hampshire Gazette printed ephemera, 1893.** This paper was printed using the New Hampshire Gazette press and distributed as a souvenir at the Chicago World's Fair. The printing press was 151 years old during its exhibition at the fair. (*Gift of Steve Fowle*)
- **S1837: Letter from Sarah Haven**

Continued on Page 7



Please join us for
The Thirty-Second Annual
Portsmouth Athenæum Pot-Luck Picnic



The Seacoast Science Center
Odiorne Point State Park, Rye, NH
Tuesday, August 26, 2025, 5 - 7 pm
(In the tent, rain or shine!)

Bring a dish to share by last name:

A-E:	Dessert
F-K:	Main Dish
L-Q:	Main Dish
R-Z	Salad

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

Appetizers, 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 : Tom Hardiman 603 431 2538

SEEN ON SOCIAL MEDIA

By JAMES SMITH • Photographic Collections Manager

SUMMER brings road repair season.

In the summer of 1939, the Maine-New Hampshire Interstate Highway was well underway with the construction of the Interstate Bridge (later known as the Sarah Mildred Long Bridge) and the highway approaches in both Kittery and Portsmouth. Funds for the project came from the Public Works Administration.

The successful bidder for New Hampshire's 2.55-mile highway was the John Iafolla Construction Co. of Dedham, Mass.

This southerly view shows Iafolla construction workers and equipment preparing the two-lane "superhighway" now known as the Route 1 Bypass in the vicinity of Hodgson Brook, Borthwick Avenue, and Hodgdon Way. In the background at left is the Morley Button Factory off Islington Street.

The new Interstate Bridge opened to the public on Nov. 8, 1940. ¶



This 1939 image from the Thomas C. Wilson Photograph Collection shows construction on the Route 1 Bypass in Portsmouth.



HONORING A MEMORY

By SHERRY WOOD

THE CATALOGING of a picture of an unidentified ballerina for the Athenaeum's online archives recently led to a heart-warming family gathering organized by Photographic Collections Manager James Smith.

Kathleen "Kathy" Birse Siegel, a retired Portsmouth teacher, coach and administrator, spotted the image in March on the Athenaeum website while looking up the downtown Fellman Dance Studio.

She immediately recognized her sister, Annemarie Birse Fernald (1955-1989).

"I would most likely never have thought to look up the dance studio, but my son sent me a picture of my 4-year-old granddaughter tap dancing," Siegel said. "That sparked my childhood memories of Annemarie and I attending weekly dance classes at the Fellman studio."

The circa-1974 photo by Jeeves Studio of Annemarie, who danced with Ballet New England, had just been posted on the website a month before.

"We are very grateful Annemarie's picture was posted and that through the Athenaeum we were able to celebrate a beautiful accomplishment in Annemarie's life," said Siegel, who after her sister's death raised Annemarie's daughter, Shannon.

"Annemarie struggled with mental health issues from high school forward so our memories are quite grim and sad. Celebrating Annemarie's accomplishments through her dance skills, on-point talent and her performances is a genuine and joyous way to preserve her memory."

The family gathering at the Athenaeum in May for a "naming ceremony" included Siegel, Shannon Fernald Parsons, Shannon's 10-year-old son, Brigsby Parsons, and two sisters-in-law.

Shannon described it "as a great honor for Annemarie to be remembered, as she was a performer artist who loved to dance for the Portsmouth community."

"I'm happy that Annemarie's memory is preserved in our photo archives and has a place in Portsmouth history," said Smith. ¶

ATHENAEUM'S TWO LECTURE SERIES CONTINUE

THE ATHENAEUM Lecture Committee (“Beauty on the Seacoast and Beyond: Art, Architecture and Gardens”) and Current Events Lecture Series wrap up 2025 with:

Wednesday, Sept. 17: The Athenaeum Lecture Committee presents “**The Lady Pepperrell House and Gardens,**” with Anne Mankin Masury at 5:30 p.m. in the Shaw Research Library.

Just across the Piscataqua, the Lady Pepperrell House and Gardens of Kittery Point is noted as one of the most high style pre-Revolutionary Georgian houses in Maine. The interaction of the Pepperrell family and later owners with some of Portsmouth’s famous residents ties the two communities together and reveals the influence of garden style on either side of the river.

Anne Mankin Masury has a master’s degree in plant science from the University of Connecticut, where she completed a program in historic landscape restoration. She worked for many years at Strawberry Banke Museum as landscape director and director of field schools in historic preservation.

Thursday, Sept. 25: The Current Events Lecture Series presents “**The Effect of Climate Change on Public Health**” with Rich DiPentima at 5:30 p.m. in the



In this photo from the Isles of Shoals Collection, Childe Hassam paints on the porch of poet Celia Thaxter’s cottage on Appledore Island. Hassam (1859-1935) is one of the artists featured in an Oct. 15 lecture.

Shaw Research Library. A reception will follow.

An Athenaeum member, DiPentima has held several important roles throughout his career in public health, most recently as deputy public health director in Man-

chester. He is on the board of directors of the New Hampshire Public Health Association.

• **Oct. 15:** The Athenaeum Lecture Committee presents “**Art History at the Isles of Shoals,**” with Douglas Nelson and Sara Morris at 5:30 p.m. in the Shaw Research Library.

Poet Celia Thaxter (1835-1894) hosted a celebrated salon on Appledore island, entertaining famed writers, musicians and artists. Nelson and Morris will discuss a variety of notable Shoals artists and their work.

The presentation will include an introduction to the Shoals Marine Laboratory’s program for undergraduate studies and the artist-in-residence program on Appledore.

Nelson, a managing director and wealth advisor at Sunpointe Investments, is actively involved on the Shoals Marine Laboratory Advisory Board.

Morris is the executive director of the Shoals Marine Lab, which is jointly operated by the University of New Hampshire and Cornell University. Her connection to Shoals began during her graduate research on bird migration at Cornell University and continued throughout her career as a college professor administrator. ¶

ARCANA

From Page 1

is found in how many approach the matter of membership exclusivity. The St. Johnsbury Athenaeum in Vermont, for example, is essentially the public library for the town, and is open to the public without membership requirements. It is administered by a board of trustees, but relies on the town for about 20% of its operating expenses.

Similarly, the Nantucket Athenaeum calls itself “Nantucket’s free public library,” having enjoyed that status since 1900. It relies on the support of donors for 75% of its operating budget.

The Chicago Athenaeum with its rather narrow focus on architecture and design

is somewhat like those in La Jolla and Pasadena in that it does not claim to advance general intellectual pursuits. But like many of the Athenaeums in the country it is open to the public (for a modest annual membership fee of \$50).

The Newberry Library is Chicago’s Athenaeum equivalent. Founded in 1887 as a free and open-to-the-public library, it has all the attributes of the largest Athenaeums, like Boston and Cincinnati, though without membership requirements. Its mission is much like that found in the institutions calling themselves Athenaeums: “[to] foster a deeper understanding of our world by inspiring research and learning in the

humanities.” With its 27.5 miles of shelving, it is superbly equipped to fulfill its stated purpose.

The Providence (RI) Athenaeum comes close to what we in Portsmouth regard as a close parallel to our own Athenaeum, though with its 250,000-volume collection it is substantially larger. Its mission is similar to ours and that of many other such libraries: “to enrich the mind, inspire the spirit, and elevate the public discourse.” Membership fees are \$175 for individuals annually.

In most instances the Athenaeums and their functional equivalents are housed in strikingly attractive buildings. The St. Johnsbury Athenaeum’s home is an impressive example of Victorian architecture; while that of the Nantucket

Continued on Next Page

Athenaeum Calendar

Wednesday, July 2: Franklin Club, 5:30 p.m. in the Sawtelle Reading Room.

Friday, Aug. 1: Art 'Round Town, 5-8 p.m., Randall Gallery, "Portsmouth in the Age of Jonathan Mitchel Sewall."

Wednesday, Aug. 6: Franklin Club, 5:30 p.m. in the Sawtelle Reading Room.

Friday, Aug. 8: 4 to 8 p.m., Portsmouth Historic Associates Twilight Tour. For tickets, go to portsmouth-historic.org.

Sunday, Aug. 24: 3 p.m., Neave Trio, Portsmouth Athenaeum Chamber Music, The Dance Hall, Kittery, Maine. Series subscription, \$100 for four concerts. At the door, \$30 admission per person, \$10 per student. Cash, credit card, check or Venmo.

Tuesday, Aug. 26: Seacoast Science Center, Annual Athenaeum Potluck Picnic, 5-7 p.m. See flyer, page 4.

Wednesday, Sept. 3: Franklin Club, 5:30 p.m. in the Sawtelle Reading Room.

Friday, Sept. 5: Art 'Round Town, 5-8 p.m., Randall Gallery.

Wednesday, Sept. 17: 5:30 p.m., 2025

lecture series, "The Lady Pepperrell House and Gardens" with Anne Mankin Masury, Shaw Research Library. Online registration available until 24 hours before the event. Proprietors, Subscribers, Friends of Athenaeum free. Non-members \$15.

Thursday, Sept. 25: 5:30 p.m., 2025 Current Events Lecture Series, "The Effect of Climate Change on Public Health," with Rich DiPentima, Shaw Research Library. Online registration available until 24 hours before the event. Proprietors, Subscribers, Friends of Athenaeum free. Non-members \$15.

Sunday, Sept. 28: Balourdet String Quartet, Portsmouth Athenaeum Chamber Music, 3 p.m. at South Church. At the door, \$30 admission per person, \$10 per student. Cash, credit card, check or Venmo.

Wednesday, Oct. 1: Franklin Club, 5:30 p.m. in the Sawtelle Reading Room.

Friday, Oct. 3: Art 'Round Town, 5-8 p.m., Randall Gallery, "Portsmouth in the Age of Jonathan Mitchel Sewall."

Sunday, Oct. 12: Terra String Quartet, Portsmouth Athenaeum Chamber

Music, 3 p.m. at South Church. At the door, \$30 admission per person, \$10 per student. Cash, credit card, check or Venmo.

Wednesday, Oct. 15: 2025 Lecture Series, "Art History at the Isles of Shoals" with Douglas Nelson and Sara Morris, 5:30 p.m. in Shaw Research Library. Online registration available until 24 hours before the event. Proprietors, Subscribers, Friends of Athenaeum free. Non-members \$15.

Wednesday, Nov. 5: Franklin Club, 5:30 p.m. in the Sawtelle Reading Room.

Friday, Nov. 7: Art "Round Town, 5-8 p.m., Randall Gallery, "Portsmouth in the Age of Jonathan Mitchel Sewall."

Sunday, Nov. 9: Piano and cello duo Jessica Xylina Osborne and Yi Qun Xu, Portsmouth Athenaeum Chamber Music, 3 p.m. at St John's Episcopal Church. At the door, \$30 admission per person, \$10 per student. Cash, credit card, check or Venmo.

Saturday, Nov. 15: Randall Gallery. Closing day for exhibit "Portsmouth in the Age of Jonathan Mitchel Sewall," 1-4 p.m.

ARCANA

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Athenaeum has the clean, spare lines of a Greek temple, with ionic columns flanking the front entrance. Our own Portsmouth Athenaeum, distinguished by its elegant Federal architecture, is arguably the most attractive structure in Portsmouth.

Several Athenaeums and membership libraries with unique names are housed in high-rise buildings, among them Boston, Newberry (Chicago), Cincinnati, and Philadelphia. All employ their spacious, elegant quarters to maximum advantage in providing their patrons with atmospheres superbly suited to the pursuit of knowledge.

The foregoing has done little to answer the questions posed at the onset. Perhaps as good an answer as any is offered by Humpty Dumpty in Lewis Carroll's *Through the Looking Glass*: "When I use a word it means just what I choose it to mean – neither more nor less." ¶

STAFF CHECK-IN

From Page 3

Foster, 1838. Foster writes to her cousin Eleanor Wardrobe Thacher describing the 20th anniversary of the South Parish Sunday School in Portsmouth. Running through the woods along the coast was among the child's adventures. (*Purchase*)

• **S1838: Odiorne Point oral history, 1988-1991.** Newly available as a digital collection, 15 oral history interviews record the history of Odiorne Point and other locales in Rye. Digital recordings and transcriptions are available. (*Gift of Christi Hassel-Shearer, produced by staff*)

• **S1441: Oral history interviews with Louise and Jack McGee and Elizabeth "Betty" (Badger) Pennington, 2010.** Newly digitized with transcriptions available, these two interviews describe the Frank Jones neighborhood and the Badger Farms' Creameries in Portsmouth. The interviews were conducted by Patricia J. Taylor and Tammi Truax. (*Gift of Patricia J. Taylor, produced by staff*) ¶

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ENTREPRENEURIAL SPIRIT LEADS TO \$10,000 GRANT

The Athenaeum recently received a \$10,000 grant from the New Hampshire Charitable Foundation's Entrepreneurs' Fund.

Keeper and Executive Director Tom Hardiman was one of 12 nonprofit leaders recognized at an awards ceremony at 3S Artspace in Portsmouth.

"For more than 16 years, the Entrepreneurs' Fund has supported nonprofits that are forging new ways to address our collective challenges," the NHCF said in a news release. "Since 2009, the fund has awarded more than \$700,000 to nonprofits serving communities across New Hampshire."

Hardiman said he was honored to accept the grant at a ceremony in May.

"The Athenaeum is moving forward in a very positive direction right now and it is being noticed in the community," he said in a statement. "The board, the staff, the volunteers, and the members are all pitching in to make good things happen."

'NH GIVES' A SUCCESS FOR THE ATHENAEUM

This year's NH Gives campaign for the Portsmouth Athenaeum raised \$2,929 from 15 donors in June.

The Athenaeum sought funds to acquire Portsmouth High School class photos from the 1920s to 1960s (\$750); digitize the vast microfilm collection (\$150 per roll) starting with the related papers of John Langdon (1741-1819); add a new book truck for the archives (\$519); and purchase general supplies to organize and protect the library and archive collections.

NH Gives, an initiative of the New Hampshire Center for Nonprofits, is a statewide, 24-hour online fundraising event designed to build community and connect donors to local nonprofits.

Statewide, it raised a total of \$3,657,374 for 643 organizations, attracting 15,176 donors.

It was the fourth year the Athenaeum participated in the campaign.

Thanks to Office Manager Stephanie Hobbs Tabit and Photographic Collections Manager James Smith for registering for the event and alerting potential donors.

And thanks to all who donated!