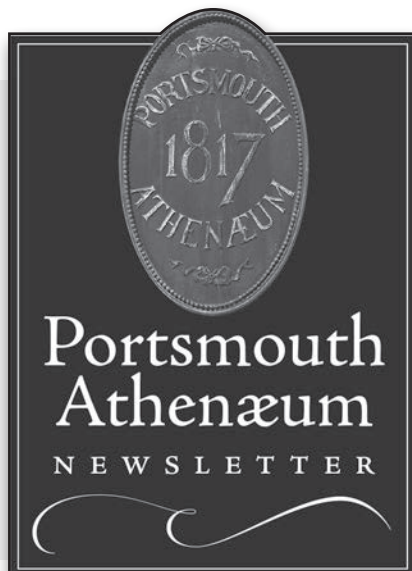


FALL 2025

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

THE PORTSMOUTH ATHENÆUM
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THE PRESIDENTS DINNER

By **JEFF KEEFE**
Athenæum President

ONE OF THE CHALLENGES of effectively leading an organization as old as the Athenæum is understanding its history. How was it formed and what decisions were made along the way to mold it into the organization it is today? More to the point, who were the decision-makers and what challenges and opportunities did they experience that inspired the paths they took to steward the organization?

With many institutions, when leaders move on, so too does much of the organizational history. At the Athenæum we are fortunate to have 15 living past presidents who represent 45 years of leadership. All are still active in the organization at some level and are happy to lend a hand if called on. Indeed, we are blessed to have such a valuable resource!

On June 26, a dinner was held in the Sawtelle Reading Room of the 1805 building to honor them and their long-standing commitment to the Athenæum. The event was attended by all living past presidents — Richard Adams,

Continued on Page 2

FROM THE KEEPER

PLAN ADVANCES FOR PORTSMOUTH ARCHIVE CENTER

By **TOM HARDIMAN**

THE BOARD of Directors held an all-day retreat in July to focus on mid- and long-term plans for the Athenæum.

Board Secretary Peggy Hodges gave a detailed PowerPoint presentation on the history of critical structural and collections storage issues identified over the last decade, leading the Athenæum to rely more and more on off-site storage of collections.

After much thoughtful discussion and debate, the board came to a consensus to move forward to transitioning our research collections and services to the planned public/private partnership of a central repository to be called the Portsmouth Archive Center.

Planning for this new facility is in the third year, under the guidance of the Mayor's Blue Ribbon Committee for Historical Archives. The new archive center will operate as an independent 501c(3) and is a joint effort between the city of Portsmouth, the Portsmouth Athenæum, Strawberry Banke Museum

and Portsmouth Historical Society. The Athenæum will retain ownership and management of its collections at the future facility.

In the interim, Athenæum board member Michael Labrie suggested evaluating short- and mid-term options for proper storage of collections stored offsite and investigating opportunities. The board authorized that all options to improve the economics and quality of short- and mid-term archive solutions be explored further.

Board President Jeff Keefe has put together a long-term study committee to look at the best ways to rethink our Market Square properties to further our mission after the Archive Center is completed and operational.

Thanks are due to board member Curt Springer for providing the venue for the retreat and to Vice President Jan Dinan and Past President Sally Gayer for wrangling the refreshments. Al Cantor facilitated the retreat. ¶

PRESIDENTS DINNER



Fifteen past presidents of the Athenaeum took part in a June 26 dinner hosted by current President Jeff Keefe.

JAMES SMITH PHOTO

45 YEARS OF LEADERSHIP IN ONE ROOM

Continued From Page 1

Karen Bouffard, Maryellen Burke, Richard Candee, Michael Chubrich, Ronan Donohoe, Sally Gayer, Bradley Lown, Wendy Lull, John Maher, John (Jack) McGee Jr., Eleonore Sanderson, John Shaw, Carvel Tefft and Thomas Watson.

PORTSMOUTH ATHENAEUM NEWSLETTER

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Jeff Keefe, Susan Kindstedt,
Robin Silva, James Smith,
Katy Sternberger, Jessica Zaricki

A delicious dinner was prepared and served on-site by Nina Parrott and her stellar team at The Fifth Flavor catering. Nina came to us by referral from our astute Athenaeum Office Manager Stephanie Tabit. As usual, Stephanie's judgment was spot on. Nina and her team made the monumental task of serving fine dining to a large group in a building with no kitchen or amenities look effortless. Bravo!

In addition to sharing a fine meal together, my purpose for the gathering was to inform, listen and learn. I was excited to present the Board of Directors' Five-Year Strategic Plan to the group and seek feedback. Far and away my favorite part of the evening was listening to each past president share their most memorable experiences during their term. What we heard was a chronological tale of how the Portsmouth Athenaeum went from a struggling organization with little purpose 45 years ago to the thriving beacon of knowledge, culture and historic preservation it is today.

Stories were told that included real estate deals that expanded the footprint over time; the decision to become a research library and steward history; how the abundant investment portfolio we depend on today got its start; and how membership opportunities grew from 50 (in 1817) to 500. More recent stories were shared about navigating the COVID era and installing a strategic framework and plan that included creating the Executive Director position. Many other stories were told, with the overall theme being constant growth. In fact, many of the strategic hurdles we face today are derived from our past decisions to expand.

I welcome the challenge to lead the Athenaeum as an organization that we as members can be proud of. I will continue to look to understand our past to make the best choices for the future. I'm thrilled to report that it was unanimously agreed upon among past presidents that the Presidents Dinner should be an annual event. ¶

SCANNING PHOTOS, OSCAR'S LETTERS, AND MORE

PHOTOGRAPHIC Collections Manager **James Smith** reports: Our great volunteers continue to scan our photographic collections, with **Mark Hubbert** and **Paula Lewinski** working on J.D. Lincoln negatives, **Peter Randall** on Douglas Armsden negatives, **Andy Jaffee** on the Portsmouth High School photos, and **Linda Benton** on the Star Island Corporation photos. **James Shanley** continues his dedicated work on rehousing the Armsden negatives.

Donna Figler transcribed and re-researched the names of about 50 Victorian women identified in a photo collage, believed to be by early Portsmouth photographer Albert Gregory (1815-1887). Donna's genealogical research will be used to create biographical records of these 19th-century Portsmouth women.

Mr. Pelee Goo the cat

Smith recently cataloged material including a circa-1860 stereocard of lower Congress Street by Albert Gregory; a circa-1888 exterior view of the Athenaeum with a Proprietor (!) seen in the window; and a circa-1912 photo album of the Nathaniel Mansion farm (perhaps more commonly known as the Caroline Weeks farm) off Bayside Road in Greenland.

A second-generation Bostonian iron merchant, Manson and his wife, Olive, retired to Greenland from Cambridge, Mass., to run the gentleman's farm. The 41-image album with printed captions includes interiors of the 12-room farmhouse, the outbuildings, livestock, fields, pastures, and their "pet of the farm," a 10-year-old cat named Mr. Pelee Goo.

Oscar's letters

Special Projects Librarian **Susan Kindstedt** recently finished processing a collection of papers related to Oscar Loughton (1839-1939), brother of Isles of Shoals poet Celia Thaxter. The collection, MS159, was donated by **Sandra Smith** via her niece **Candis Regan**. It contains personal correspondence, poetry and



Oscar Loughton (1839-1939), who ran the Appledore and Oceanic hotels, is pictured on a sightseeing trip around the Isles of Shoals, circa 1930.

ISLES OF SHOALS COLLECTION

ephemera.

The correspondence in the collection is primarily to and from Oscar Loughton and his niece, Rosamond Thaxter. Letters often discuss Oscar wintering at the Hobkirk Inn in South Carolina or preparing to return to New Hampshire.

In a 1929 letter a 90-year-old Oscar tells his niece that he purchased a car and is learning to drive. Three weeks later he writes that his driving skills have been criticized and he was looking for a book to help him improve.

The collection also includes a large number of condolences sent to Rosamond after Oscar's death in 1939, as well as Oscar Loughton's poetry.

"I am also working on formatting finding aids for our website for some more recently processed archival collections," Kindstedt said. "I'm continuing to work with membership lists for the Middle Street Baptist Church, which our dedicated volunteer **Joan Hammond** spent

countless hours putting into a spreadsheet. I'm now formatting the data to add to our catalog."

Book sale

Librarian **Robin Silva** helped organize and oversee the first Athenaeum Book Sale in nearly a decade.

The Oct. 12 event at 170 State St. featured 19th-century books weeded from the Athenaeum's collection, as well as history titles, postcards, ephemera, and books donated by members of the Athenaeum. It raised just over \$1,500.

Proceeds from the sale go toward the purchase of all newly published books, both for the circulating library and the Shaw Research Library.

History's mysteries

Research Librarian **Jessica Zaricki** writes:

I've been working with Portsmouth High

Continued on Page 4

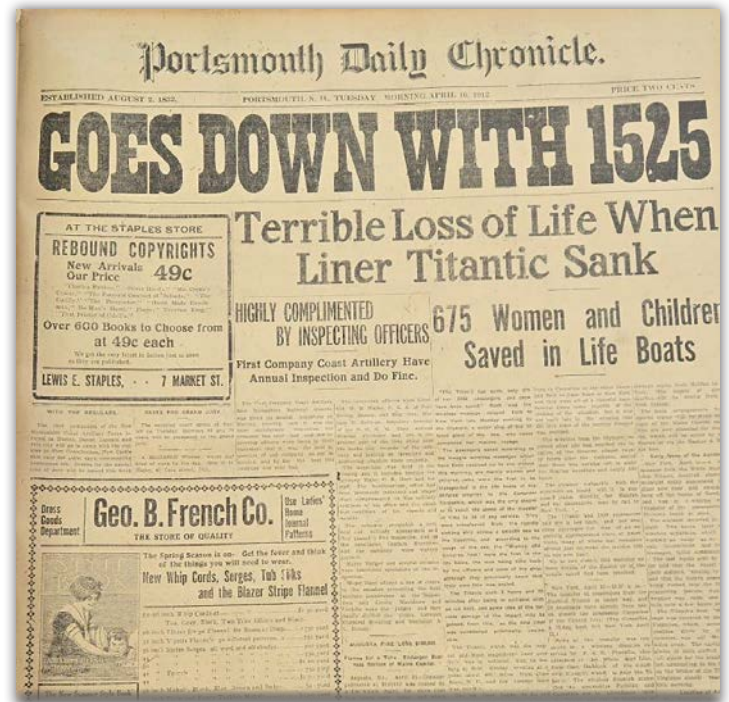
NEWSPAPER-PALOOZA

ATHENAEUM staff and volunteers continued a comprehensive assessment of the print newspaper collection to determine the press runs, condition, and accessibility. With the weekly Portsmouth Journal now complete, the team continued their work on the Portsmouth Daily Chronicle.

The group was able to “travel” 40 years, examining the daily newspaper from the early 1870s to 1914. Along the way, the newspaper reported on the death of Portsmouth industrialist Frank Jones, the eventual assassination of President William McKinley, the negotiations for the Portsmouth Peace Treaty, and the sinking of the Titanic. The Chronicle ran from 1852 to 1921, so there are only seven more years to complete the inventory.

The cost of rehousing these two newspapers is estimated at \$8,000.

The project team comprises staff members Susan Kindstedt, Robin Silva, James Smith, and Jessica Zaricki, as well as recently retired staff member June Spezzano. The team includes Athenaeum members and volunteers Linda Benton, Deb Child, Donna Figler, Mark Hubbert, Paula Lewinski, Susan MacDougall, James Shanley, and Sherry Wood. ¶



This April 16, 1912, edition of the Portsmouth Chronicle was among those recently inventoried by Athenaeum staff and volunteers.

PROVIDED BY JAMES SMITH

CHECK-IN

Continued from Page 3

School history teacher **Maya Glos** on her newly developed class, “History’s Mysteries.” The first part of the course focuses on truths and fictions surrounding the 1873 Smuttynose Murders.

The Athenaeum has provided additional support by supplying primary source documents including copies of pre-trial documentation and the transcript from Louis Wagner’s trial. The honors level class of about 15 students visited the Athenaeum in late September to view contemporary newspaper articles and learn about conducting local historical research.

The ephemera collection continues to grow, and we received a donation of a Japanese print given to Portsmouth Mayor Mary Keenan in 1986 from the Japanese delegation representing our sister city in Nichinan in commemoration of that relationship.

Things are moving around in the Map Room as we look to consolidate the collection and make better use of our space.

Once that project is complete, we plan to process and catalog a series of maps from the Harrison Homer Workman border dispute papers (*MS 120*).

Archives highlights

Archivist **Katy Sternberger** shared this selection from the Athenaeum archives and special collections:

- **William Bell Collier marine architectural drawings, c1933.**

About 115 architectural drawings for sailing vessels drawn by naval architect William Bell Collier, which were found in the attic of 426 State St., where the Collier family lived from 1922 to 1975. Also includes a grouping of drawings by naval architect and inventor William Starling Burgess. (*AD052, gift of Mark Moses*)

- **Portsmouth Trust and Guarantee Company share certificates, 1871-1876.**

Includes 113 share certificates, most of which are dated from 1871 at the time of the bank’s founding. Some of the

shareholders were women. (*S1841, gift of Janet Hurley*)

- **Edward C. Ewen papers, 1894-1914.**

As a young man attending Portsmouth High School, Edward C. Ewen lived at 108 Burkitt St. His papers were found in the wall of the home and include love letters from fellow student Charlotte M. Paul. Also included are records of the Ewen family grocery business. (*MS160, gift of Tamara Tate*)

- **The Seacoast NH LGBT History Project collection (MS148)** started by **Tom Kaufhold** has been featured in the FOCAS Community Archives Map. The map includes more than 350 community archives across the United States and Canada. This interactive tool highlights and connects archives led by and for BIPOC, LGBTQIA+, disabled, and other historically marginalized communities, amplifying their visibility and making it easier to find and connect with one another. FOCAS (Faculty Organizing for Community Archives Support) is a project funded by the Mellon Foundation. ¶

THE HIDDEN ORIGINS OF OUR READING ROOM

By TOM HARDIMAN | Executive Director and Keeper

Editor's Note: Proprietor Dick Adams authored his Arcana column for the Athenaeum newsletter for more than 13 years. We'd like to thank him for his many illuminating articles. Keeper Tom Hardiman has offered to continue casting light on our beloved institution's history.

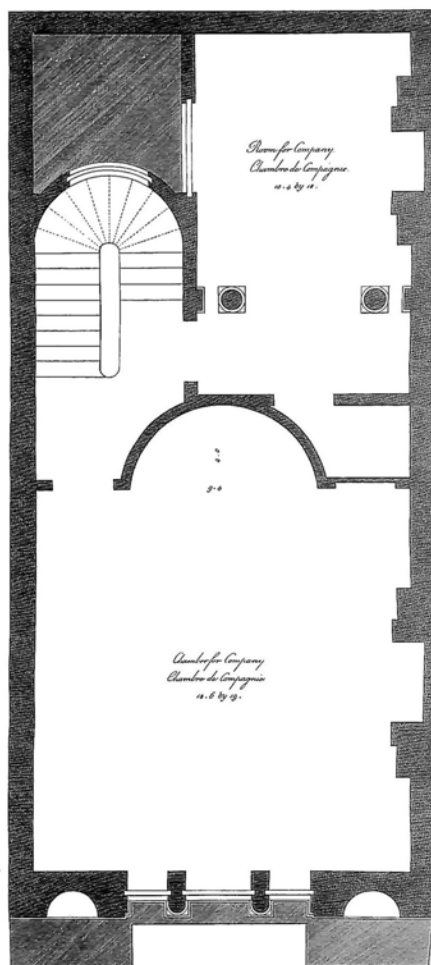
NEARLY EVERYONE who steps through the door at 9 Market Square for the first time is awed by the grandeur of the Sawtelle Reading Room, even though it is only 23 feet wide.

Some already know that the building was constructed in 1805 for the NH Fire & Marine Company, but few understand that the awe was intentional and designed from the start.

When the NHF&M was founded in 1803, it chose to demonstrate the value of insurance by building on land devastated by a December 1802 fire. In 1804 the company paid builder/architect Bradbury Johnson of Pepperrellborough, Mass. (now Saco, Maine) \$30 to draw the remarkable plan.

The NHF&M only ever intended to occupy the ground floor, and rented the upper floors to a number of Masonic lodges, including the Grand Lodge of NH. The insurance office was in what is now the back hall and bathroom; the front room was always intended to be a newspaper reading room. It is now the oldest such room in continuous operation in the United States.

To bring the bling, Bradbury Johnson turned to a major work of Neo-Classical design: *Works in Architecture* by Robert and James Adam, published in 1774. The three-volume folio was so expensive that very few copies were available in America at the turn of the 19th century. Two copies are known to have been in Maine at the time. One was in the library of Gen. Henry Knox of Thomaston. It is more likely that Johnson had access to the one in the



The design of the Athenaeum's Sawtelle Reading Room was inspired by Plate 76 of Works in Architecture by Robert and James Adam, published in 1774.

library of Alexander Parris of Portland, the architect of St. John's Church in Portsmouth in 1806.

The surprising plan of Johnson's Reading Room, with its semi-apsidal north wall and iconic curved door, is inspired by Plate 76 of *Works in Architecture*, depicting the British Coffee House in London. The selection of that design was not accidental. Insurance offices and joint stock companies trace their origin to the rise of coffee houses in 17th and 18th century Northern Europe. Lloyd's of London was originally a coffee house.

The feathered capitals of the reeded pilasters of the arched door and windows of the

south wall are a miniature version of the garden front exterior pilasters of Kenwood House in London illustrated in Plate 12 of *Works in Architecture*. Johnson had used the same motif to decorate the pulpit of the Pepperrellborough meeting house of 1801-03.

The elegant gothic cornice is taken from plate 6 of Asher Benjamin's *The Country Builder's Assistant* of 1797, but the motif traces all the way back to Batty Langley's *Gothic Architecture Improved by Rules and Proportions* from 1742. All of the joiner's work, including the cornice and the curved door, was executed by James Nutter.

The greatest success of Johnson's design for the building is the iconic Market Square façade, which is an aggregate of several design sources adapted to fit the unusually narrow lot. The design of an arcaded ground floor with giant-order pilasters rising through all of the upper floors can be seen in the John Peirce house on Middle Street of 1799. Precedents can be found at least a century before that in architectural literature.

Two direct comparables for a three-bay iteration of the type can be found in Robert Adam's design for the Arts and Commerce building in London, 1774, and Alexander Parris' Maine Fire & Marine Insurance office in Portland, 1803. Johnson reverted to the composite order of Adam rather than the Roman Doric chosen by Parris.

To balance the proportions of these models to the narrow site in Market Square, Johnson looked to a design for a townhouse illustrated in Andrew George Cook's *Builder's Magazine* from 1774. Johnson used the same source to design two other Market Square buildings: the Market House of 1799 and the NH Bank of 1804.

So the next time you walk through the lovely double doors at 9 Market Square (designed by Proprietor James L. Garvin) and experience the "wow," stop and think about the extensive research and planning that went into creating it. ¶

THE PERFECT PICNIC

Keeper and Executive Director Tom Hardiman called the 32nd annual Portsmouth Athenaeum Pot-Luck Picnic “a fabulous event.”



Among the 155 members and friends who attended were, in the photo at left, Grace Peirce, and Peter Randall, who socialized under the Seacoast Science Center tent at Odiorne Point State Park in Rye.

In the photo above, Douglas Aykroyd (left) and Curt Springer were among those showing off their summer style.

Hardiman thanked the Athenaeum Social Committee, led by Kathy Logan and Mary Beth Herbert. Mellissa Walls donated the services of Maeve’s Mobile Cocktail Hour.

PHOTOS BY SHERRY WOOD

PROPRIETORS ART SHOW COMING UP

By JUDY GROPPA | Exhibits Committee

The Proprietors Art Show opens Dec. 5 in the Randall Gallery as part of the holiday gala at the Athenaeum.

Proprietors, Subscribers, and spouse/partners as well as members of the Friends of the Athenaeum are invited to submit fine or decorative art, crafts and published writings.

Past shows have included paintings, photographs, sculptures, fiber works, jewelry, pottery and woodworking.

Items should be delivered to the Athenaeum from Nov. 20 to Nov. 30. If the Randall Gallery is not open, please leave your art near Librarian Robin Silva’s desk. Be sure to fill out the paperwork, which can be found next to the copy machine.

Wall art must be ready for hanging.

Robin creates a display of Proprietor publications from the current year. Check with her to see if she has included your work.

The show will be open until the Athenaeum’s Annual Meeting in January.

Please email Judy Groppa if you have any questions: (judygroppa@gmail.com)

SEEN ON SOCIAL MEDIA



The Colonial Theater on Congress Street, 1941. It was demolished in 1989.

PASS THE POPCORN!

By JAMES SMITH | Photographic Collections Manager

THIS IS A 1941 view of the Colonial Theater on Congress Street. The theater marquee was the entryway and lobby to the former vaudeville theater, which was on the corner of Porter and Church streets.

About 1963, the Colonial was sold to and managed by E.M. Loew's Theaters, which would be in operation until the mid-1980s.

In the photograph, the building to the right of the theater was the Rogers Block, which was destroyed by a fire in 1964. Although the theater survived the two-alarm blaze, the marquee was damaged and renovated.

Eventually, the old theater was acquired by the neighboring Eagle Photo, which occupied the former Hunking Wentworth house to the left of the theater.

In 1989, the back of the theater was demolished, and in 2005, the Eagle Photo block was demolished to construct the current large brick commercial and residential complex. ♪

COLONIAL
PORTSMOUTH

Sunday, Monday, Tuesday December 5, 6, 7

KATHARINE HEPBURN, GINGER ROGERS
ADOLPHE MENJOU

in
"STAGE DOOR"

Night at the Movies Hula Heaven Paramount News

Wednesday and Thursday December 8, 9

BERT LAHR, MISCHA AUER, ALICE BRADY, JIMMY SAVO, LOUISE FAZENDA

in
"MERRY-GO-ROUND OF 1938"

Tip for Cinderella Picking Pets Copenhagen

Friday and Saturday December 10, 11

PAT O'BRIEN, GEORGE BRENT
WAYNE MORRIS, DORIS WESTON

in
"SUBMARINE D-1"

Decathlon Champion Latest News

1938 USA

"Some day they're going to cut you open and find a rock where your heart ought to be."

THEY FIGHT IT OUT!

Terry Randall, born with a silver tongue in her mouth, and Jean Maitland, jobless song and dance girl with a gift for barbed wire cracks... What strange fate made them room mates in a theatrical boarding house!

This program from the archives features the film "Stage Door," which played at Portsmouth's Colonial Theater in December 1937.

GIFT OF JAMES SMITH

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ARCHIVIST: Katy Sternberger
SPECIAL PROJECTS LIBRARIAN: Susan Kindstedt
RESEARCH LIBRARIAN: Jessica Zaricki

Athenaeum Calendar

Sunday, Oct. 19: Athenaeum tea for new members, 4:30-6 p.m., Sawtelle Reading Room.

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

Saturday, Nov. 1: Join guest curator Nancy Hammond for a tour of her exhibit, "Portsmouth in the Age of Jonathan Mitchel Sewall" in the Randall Gallery at 11 a.m. Following the curator's tour, there will be a discussion on the Seacoast Village Project, followed by a simple reception. The Seacoast Village Project is a nonprofit member organization making "aging in place" a realistic possibility by supporting the social, educational and service needs of older adults living independently.

It encompasses neighboring towns around Portsmouth, Exeter and Dover. For more information, go to seacoast.helpfulvillage.com.

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

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

Saturday, Nov. 15: Closing day for exhibit, "Portsmouth in the Age of

Jonathan Mitchel Sewall," 1-4 p.m., Randall Gallery.

Wednesday, Dec. 3: Franklin Club, 5:30 p.m., Sawtelle Reading Room.

Friday, Dec. 5: Athenaeum Holiday Gala. Invitations forthcoming.

Saturday, Dec. 6: The annual Proprietors Art Show opens to the public in the Randall Gallery, 1 p.m.

Thursday, Dec. 11: Athenaeum Holiday Concert, 7:30 p.m. at South Church with Boston Bay Quartet: Matthew Lee, flute; Max Reed, clarinet; Camden Christenson Ward, oboe; and Dr. April Verser, bassoon. A festive program of holiday favorites and chamber classics. Donations gratefully accepted.

