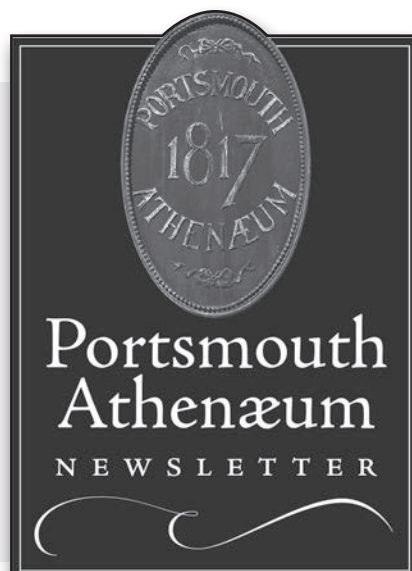


FALL 2026

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

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FROM OUR BOARD PRESIDENT

SEARCH ON FOR NEW EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

By JEFFREY KEEFE

THE SEARCH COMMITTEE for the Portsmouth Athenaeum's new Executive Director is rolling up its sleeves and getting to work. We are planning a comprehensive national search, with the goal of having a highly qualified director in place by the spring of 2027.

Longtime Executive Director Tom Hardiman's retirement over the summer creates both a tremendous opportunity and a responsibility to search for and hire the best person to lead the Athenaeum through its next chapter and execute the Board of Directors' vision and goals.

The first phase of the plan was the hiring of Interim Director Cathy Fields in July. Her challenge was to keep business going as usual while performing an in-depth assessment of the entire organization to determine what traits, skills, abilities and experience we would need in our next Executive Director. I'm very pleased to report that Cathy has crushed this challenge and is perfectly situated to assist in our search. Phase two of the search was to form a Search Committee.

The committee convened on Sept. 24. It is made up of Interim Director Cathy Fields, Board Secretary Peggy Hodges, former Athenaeum Board member Peter Lamb, Past President Wendy Lull and me.

This is an exciting time for the Athenaeum and I'm looking forward to working with the search team. With proper due diligence, patience and ultimately the right selection, I'm confident the Athenaeum will be well-positioned to thrive into the future. ¶



Architect John Mead Howells took this photo of the Portsmouth Athenaeum almost 90 years ago.

ARMSDEN ACCOMPLISHMENT: NEARLY 10,000 SCANS

FROM APRIL TO SEPTEMBER, Photographic Collections Manager **James Smith** scanned and inventoried the final 67 boxes of 5x7 negatives in the P0060 Douglas Armsden collection. It was a total of nearly 10,000 scans, accounting for roughly 737 hours of time.

"To achieve this accelerated rate, I used multiple scanners at the same time over two floors," Smith said. "Got my steps in!"

The subjects of these large-format negatives were people, most from the Seacoast area during the mid-20th century. They included children, grandparents, couples with pets, passport ID photos, wedding

formals, family groups for greeting cards, headshots for employees at local businesses, author photos, and military officers from the Portsmouth Naval Shipyard and Pease Air Force Base.

The next phase in scanning Armsden photographs is the final grouping of negatives: the 4x5s. This summer, Proprietors **Mark Hubbert** and **Paula Lewinski** completed scanning the 4x5 architectural subjects and are now into commercial subjects.

Meanwhile, Proprietor **James Shanley** continues to rehouse the final grouping of 4x5 negatives: the people.

"Armsden was a prolific professional



Nearly 10,000 scans were required to inventory these boxes of Seacoast photographer Douglas Armsden's 5x7 negatives.

JAMES SMITH PHOTO

photographer spanning decades, and we've been working on this material in stages for several years," Smith said. "Once cataloged, the Armsden photographs will come close to doubling the existing Athenaeum collection of 37,000 records. At times this expansive collection has been overwhelming, but we are starting to see the other side of it."

In addition to Armsden, Smith worked on several other collections, and volunteer **Linda Benton** has continued her work in scanning the P0029 Star Island deposit collection. Thank you to Mark, Paula, James, and Linda!

Team effort

James Smith also reports: "This year, the staff-led space usage committee tackled the closet off the kitchenette. I redesigned the area into a more functional, accessible storage zone that now also houses the folding chairs for lectures and other events. In August, the amazing Athenaeum Building Committee made this plan a reality. Thank you to **Mark Hubbert, Ken Wolf, and Steve Buczeko.**"

Whaling, Gold Rush

Librarian **Robin Silva** is adding to the online catalog a transcription (done by Proprietor **Nancy Hammond**) of a log of the Portsmouth whale ship *Ann Parry* written by a member of the crew, John Henry Wheeler, for a voyage (Jan. 8, 1833 to Sept. 7, 1836) to the South Pacific.

Wheeler was 16 when he went to sea. At the end of the journal, the Portsmouth native writes, "We are safely landed after 44 months of slavery."

The 116-page journal is composed of three folios stitched into a sail-canvas cover.

In the 1830s, Wheeler moved to Massillon, Ohio, and became an insurance agent. After living in Columbus, Ohio, he moved to Nebraska. He died in 1886.

His journal and an accompanying whale tooth (presumably brought back from



Physician John G. Pike kept a diary of his 1850-1856 adventures in the California Gold Rush. A transcription was recently added to the Athenaeum's online catalog.

Wheeler's trip) were donated to the Athenaeum by his descendants, **Robert J. Wheeler** and **Mary Capperell**.

Robin is also adding a transcription (done by Proprietor **Joan Hammond**) of a diary of Boston physician John G. Pike, who traveled to California (1850-1856) to mine gold.

Pike (1814-1879) was born in Exeter and graduated from Phillips Exeter Academy in 1831. He later went to Botanic-Medical College of Ohio, graduating in 1848. He journeyed to California for the Gold Rush in 1850.

His two-volume diary describes his experiences in the California goldfields near Sacramento and his return journey East. The Athenaeum archives also contain an 1874-1876 log of his Boston medical practice.

An interesting connection between the whaler *Ann Parry* and the Gold Rush is that the Portsmouth vessel was sold in the spring of 1849 in Salem, Mass. and "sailed to California loaded with gold seekers," according to an article in the

Continued on Page 6

CELEBRATING CELIA THAXTER

By SHERRY WOOD

SPRING WILL BRING an exhibit on Isles of Shoals poet Celia Thaxter (1835-1894) in the Randall Gallery.

Curator Dudley Dudley and co-curators Douglas Nelson, Anne Beattie, Mara Witzling and Mary Jo Monusky will be dipping into private collections and the Star Island Corporation Collection for items related to Thaxter.

The lighthouse keeper's daughter became a recognized writer who hosted literary greats and artists drawn to the islands and her family's hotel, the Appledore House.

She became friends with Ralph Waldo Emerson, Nathaniel Hawthorne, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, John Greenleaf Whittier and Sarah Orne Jewett, among many others.

Artists Childe Hassam and William Morris Hunt gave her painting lessons. Thaxter had always decorated her journals, sketchbooks and poetry volumes with watercolors. In 1876, she began hand-decorating china as a way to supplement her income and support her family.

The Athenaeum mezzanine has long housed a small collection of this pottery.

Proprietor and graphic artist Susan Kress Hamilton described Thaxter's "painted poetry" in a 2017 book celebrating the Athenaeum's bicentennial.

"As subject matter, Celia often painted



Poet Celia Thaxter's olive-painted jug on display in the Athenaeum mezzanine will be featured in a spring 2027 exhibit in the Randall Gallery. SHERRY WOOD PHOTO

the natural species that endured at the Isles through extreme weather and exposure, plants such as the Scarlet Pimpernel, the wild *Rosa rugosa* and the seaweeds that grew on the rocky shore, as well as depicting many of her garden flowers," Hamilton wrote.

Three pieces in the Athenaeum Isles of Shoals Collection depict the olive branch.

During a trip to Europe in 1880, Celia wrote to friend Annie Fields: "O, there

is nothing so beautiful in its way as an olive, so graceful, so elegant, so classic, one might say."

A quote written in Greek on an olive-decorated jug on the mezzanine is translated from Sophocles' play "Oedipus at Colonus" and makes reference to "bright-eyed Athena."

The exhibit is expected to open March 5, 2027, and will coincide with Art 'Round Town. ¶

PROPRIETORS, SHOW US YOUR ART!

THE PROPRIETORS ART SHOW opens Dec. 4 in the Randall Gallery as part of the holiday party 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. 18 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, when contributors are asked to pick up their work.

Questions? Please email judygroppa@gmail.com.

HAVEN BOOKCASE HOLDS A TREASURE

IN A PREVIOUS EDITION of *Arcana* we learned about the extraordinary generosity of James E. Sheafe, who gave the first cash bequest to the Athenaeum upon his death in 1830 at just 19 years old. The next cash bequest came from someone not much older than Sheafe. Horace Appleton Haven was only 21 when he died in 1843.

In his will, Haven left \$2,000 to the Athenaeum — \$1,000 for the purchase of books and \$1,000 for endowment, the first such gift to the library. Remarkably, he was not a member of the Athenaeum, but his father, Nathaniel A. Haven, Jr. (1790-1826), was one of the founders and the first board secretary. His mother, Eliza Wentworth Haven, was the first woman to purchase a Proprietor's share in her own right.

Rev. Charles Burroughs, Rev. Andrew Peabody (later editor of the *North American Review*), and Athenaeum Librarian George Jaffrey were chosen as a committee to select books to be purchased with the generous fund.

They selected a few old rarities, such as the eight-volume *Harleian Miscellany* (London: 1744-46) and *Coryat's Crudities* (London: 1776), but primarily they bought current large and expensive sets imported from London.



This Haven Medal was presented in 1905 to Portsmouth High School senior Marion F. Thomas (1888-1960). The Haven Medal is still awarded today.

GIFT OF KEVIN LAFOND

That included 39 volumes of the Camden Society's reprints of rare books and manuscripts (1838-1847); 22 volumes of the *London Encyclopedia* (1845); 24 volumes of the *Library of Fathers of the Holy Catholic Church* (1844); *Storer's History and Antiquities of the Cathedral Churches of Great Britain* (1815); three different sets of *Walpole's Letters*; and several volumes on English heraldry.

They also bought a number of J.C. Loudon's sets on horticulture, including *Arboretum et Fruticetum Britannicum* (1841); *Encyclopedia of Plants* (1841); *Encyclopedia of Agriculture* (1844); *Encyclopedia of Gardening* (n.d.); and *Encyclopedia of Cottage, Farm, and Villa Architecture* (1842).

The books were set into two elegant mahogany bookcases with locking glass doors, commissioned to Portsmouth cabinetmaker Edmund M. Brown. A century and a half later, the spines of the books are faded with age, but the interiors are pristine. Many still have uncut signatures, testifying to the fact that they were never read.

Other legacies in Haven's will included \$3,000 to Harvard, from which he graduated in 1828 at the age of 16. The money was to be used for books for the library. At first the books were to be solely in the subject of literature, but a codicil added to the will changed that to astronomy and mathematics.

In addition, \$1,000 went to the New Hampshire Bible Society; \$1,000 went to the American Peace Society; \$500 to the Seamen's Friend's Society; and \$500 to the South Parish Sunday School.

The best remembered of Haven's bequests was \$800 to be invested by the Selectmen of Portsmouth to provide prizes to the best scholars in Latin classics, Latin composition, Greek, and mathematics. The prizes were originally gold and silver medals.

Athenaeum Proprietors Kevin Lafond and Tom Watson have done extensive research into the history of the Haven medals, which are still presented to Portsmouth High School students. ¶

PORTSMOUTH ATHENAEUM NEWSLETTER

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SEEN ON SOCIAL MEDIA

By JAMES SMITH | Photographic Collections Manager

ON THE TRAIL OF A TINY BUILDING

IN A RECENT “Where was this” post, a man pictured standing in front of a one-story market (identified through research as the Jenness Store on Willard Avenue near the corner of Lafayette Road) is probably store proprietor Harry Brackett Jenness, circa 1915.

A banner above the market advertises “Ice Cold Tonic.” The store appears to have been recently constructed, as the pine-pitch patches from sealing the nails are visible and the building is not yet painted.

Behind the store are buildings along Lafayette Road and South Street that confirm the location.

According to deeds, in 1915, Elizabeth Wallace Jenness (1888-1967) purchased land from her mother, Malvina Carter Wallace Kingsbury, near the corner of Willard Avenue and Lafayette Road.

The store was then owned by Elizabeth and her husband, Harry Brackett Jenness (1885-1965), both of whom had experience within the retail and grocery businesses.

This endeavor, however, was short-lived. By early 1917, the property was advertised at auction as “the former Jenness Store,” and lumber dealer Robert I. Sugden purchased the parcel. The Sugden family owned property on Willard Avenue. In 1918, the Jenness family removed permanently to Plymouth County in Massachusetts.

Across town in August 1922, Zeda Stokl bought the former Spalding School parcel at auction at the corner of Bartlett and Clinton streets as an investment property. Shortly thereafter, a one-story building appeared on the corner of Clinton Street with the address of 205 Bartlett St.



At top, a 1915 image of the Jenness Store on Portsmouth's Willard Avenue shows a man likely to be store owner Harry Brackett Jenness. A 2015 photo appears to be the same structure, now located on Bartlett Street in Portsmouth.

Today, that building still stands and appears to be the same structure as the former Jenness Store on Willard Avenue.

A grouping of glass-plate negatives recently acquired and added to the collection led to this surmise. ¶

PORTSMOUTH MARINE SOCIETY SAILS ON

By PETER E. RANDALL

PORTSMOUTH formed a marine society in 1808. Its purpose was for local sea captains to share information about national and foreign ports and as a benevolent organization to support families of captains and officers lost at sea.

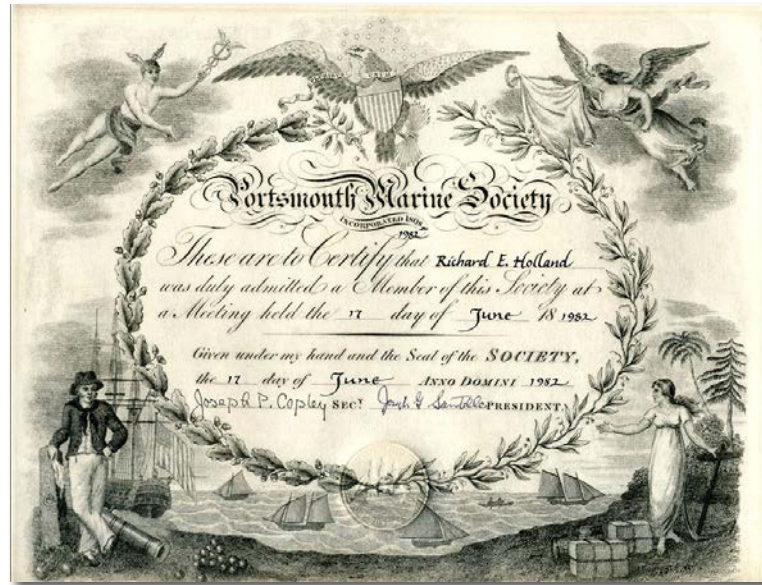
As engines replaced sails, the marine society ceased operation in 1895, but the engraving plates it used to print certificates of membership were preserved at the Athenaeum.

In 1981, Portsmouth businessman, philanthropist and Proprietor Joseph Sawtelle joined with Athenaeum curator Joe Copley and local historian Ray Brighton to recreate the Portsmouth Marine Society as a non-profit educational organization. Its mission was to research local maritime history and release written reports, i.e. books.

Funds for the program were raised by using the old Portsmouth Marine Society plates to print new certificates that were sold for \$135 to more than 100 supporters.

I was the series editor and producer of the books. We ultimately produced 31 hardbound volumes of Portsmouth history, most on maritime subjects.

We tried to do a book each year. When we tried to do more than one, Joe Saw-



This Portsmouth Marine Society membership certificate was issued to Richard E. Holland in 1982; it was made from the same engraving plates used for the original marine society (1808-1895).

telle provided extra funds.

Former Portsmouth Herald editor Ray Brighton wrote five books. I wrote about the Treaty of Portsmouth negotiations that ended the Russo-Japanese war of 1905. Proprietor Woody Openo produced a history of the Sarah Mildred Long Bridge and the Route 1 Bypass, and we did a popular book on Portsmouth samplers.

Other topics included submarines, tugboats, gundalows, whaling lighthouses, the Isles of Shoals and trolley lines. Many of these titles can be found on the shelves of the Portsmouth Athenaeum. (Search

“Portsmouth Marine Society” on our website or ask Athenaeum staff.)

Sawtelle died suddenly at 71 in May 2000. Within days, a fire at Allard’s warehouse in Newington destroyed the society’s book inventory. Portsmouth Marine Society was able to reprint several titles in paper, but not the clothbound editions.

Ultimately, it became the publishing arm of the Portsmouth Historical Society. The Portsmouth Marine Society Press recently produced the 45th book in the series. Many are available for sale on the historical society’s website, www.portsmouthhistory.org. ¶

CHECK-IN

From Page 2

Athenaeum archives. The ship was sold again once it reached San Francisco Bay.

Exhibit update

Research Librarian **Jessica Zaricki** curated our current exhibit, “The Red Light District: Vice in Portsmouth, NH at the Turn of the 20th Century.” The exhibition drew a record-breaking 120-plus visitors at its July 10 opening in the Randall Gallery.

“Since then, the show has sparked deep community interest and thoughtful conversations about this lesser-known chapter of Portsmouth’s history,” Zaricki said. “Through artifacts, photographs, and a connecting narrative, the exhibit offers a compelling and respectful glimpse into the social dynamics and hidden histories of Portsmouth’s past.”

As of mid-September, 715 visitors had viewed the exhibit.

Zaricki said she especially enjoyed hearing from visitors with personal connections to the exhibit, including a former neighbor of brothel owner Cappy Stewart and the great-great-grandson of Portsmouth Police Marshal Thomas Entwistle.

The exhibit is open Tuesdays through Saturdays, 1-4 p.m., through Nov. 14.

Interested in volunteering as a gallery greeter or for Art ’Round Town? Email mtilden@portsmouthathenaeum.org

Joseph Frost legacy

Special Projects Librarian Susan Kindstedt is processing new archival materials from the estate of Athenaeum Proprietor Joseph W. P. Frost. He (1923-2008) was a history enthusiast who contributed significantly to the research and preservation

Continued on Page 8

“A FLAWLESS EVENT”



The 33rd Annual Portsmouth Athenaeum Pot-Luck Picnic on Aug. 24 at the Seacoast Science Center in Rye was a rousing success. More than 170 guests joined the party. Interim Director Cathy Fields wrote: “It was my first members’ event in my role as interim director, and it was a pleasure to meet so many enthusiastic supporters of the Athenaeum — special thanks to the Social Committee and the many volunteers who pulled off a flawless event.”

KEN GOLDMAN PHOTO

Athenaeum Calendar

Sunday, Oct. 18: Portsmouth Athenaeum Chamber Music Series, Piano and Violin Duo, 3-5 p.m., St. John’s Episcopal Church, Portsmouth. Pianist Thomas Pandolfi blends poetry and fire in his performances of Chopin, Liszt, Brahms, Tchaikovsky, Rachmaninov, and Gershwin. Violinist Leo Sushansky is artistic director of the National Chamber Ensemble. \$30 admission for adults, \$10 for students. Pay in advance at www.portsmouthathenaeum.org or at the door. Cash, credit card, Venmo, or check.

Wednesday, Oct. 21: 2026 Lecture Series. Janet Polasky will speak on “Remember the Lades: Moving Beyond Abigail Adams,” 5:30-6:30 p.m., Shaw Research Library. Author and UNH Presidential Professor of History Emerita Polasky will explore what liberty and equality meant to women and how ideas arising in New England in 1776 moved into the revolutionary world beyond, only to return later.

Sponsored by Whole Wealth Management. Reservations required. Click on “Events” at www.portsmouthathenaeum.org. Non-members \$15; free for Proprietors, Subscribers, and Friends of the Athenaeum.

Wednesday, Nov. 4: Franklin Club, 5:30-6:30 p.m., Sawtelle Reading Room.

Friday, Nov. 6: Art ’Round Town, “The Red Light District,” 5-8 p.m., Randall Gallery.

Sunday, Nov. 8: Portsmouth Athenaeum Chamber Music Series, Balourdet Quartet, 3-5 p.m., John’s Episcopal Church, Portsmouth. Balourdet pushes the boundaries of the string quartet repertoire in more than 70 concerts each season. Pay in advance at www.portsmouthathenaeum.org or at the door, \$30 per person, \$10 per student. Cash, credit card, Venmo, or check.

Thursday, Nov. 12: Book talk by Kenneth M. Sheldon, author of *Captain*

John Manley: Patriot, Privateer, and America’s Forgotten First Hero, 5-6 p.m. Free. Reservations required. Click on “Events” at www.portsmouthathenaeum.org

Saturday, Nov. 14: Closing of “The Red Light District,” 1-4 p.m., Randall Gallery.

Wednesday, Dec. 2: Franklin Club, 5:30-6:30 p.m., Sawtelle Reading Room.

Friday, Dec. 4: Athenaeum Holiday Gala, 5:30-7:30 p.m. Invitations forthcoming.

Saturday, Dec. 5: Opening of the Athenaeum Proprietors Art Show, 1-4 p.m., Randall Gallery. Story, Page 3.

Thursday, Dec. 10: Athenaeum Holiday Concert, 7 p.m., North Church, Portsmouth. Maine-based Coastal Winds Clarinet Quartet will perform a variety of classical and traditional seasonal favorites. All welcome. Donations welcome at the door.

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CHECK-IN

From Page 6

of local history. The most recent donation includes a wide variety of archival materials, including manuscripts, photographs, pamphlets, ephemera, and curatorial items. The collection remains in processing and is not yet available for research.

Among the materials is a large collection of letters Frost wrote home to his family in Kittery while in Europe during World War II. He served as a sergeant in the U.S. Army Air Corps and later in the U.S. Naval Reserve. University of New Hampshire intern Caleb Brower began processing the letters this summer.

Frost was a descendant of William Pepperrell, hero of the Battle of Louisburg in 1745, and a distant cousin of poet Robert Frost. He researched and collected materials related to both. The recent donation includes several 18th-century documents related to Kittery and Wil-

liam Pepperrell, as well as a 19th-century copy work book by a Frost relative.

The hope is to make the collection available for research in 2027.

Archive highlights

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

MS167: Betty's Dream Foundation records, 1978-2017. Includes scrapbooks, correspondence, newspaper clippings, and ephemera. In 1984, the Betty's Dream Foundation was formed to support Betty's Dream Apartments, also called Rainbow Apartments. These apartments were the dream of Betty Taylor and her family to establish independent living for young adults with physical disabilities. It was the first organization of its kind in New Hampshire.

(Gift of Betty's Dream Foundation)

S1858: "Song" by Oscar Loughton, c1890. Poem written on Appledore House stationery with references to Appledore Island. (Gift of Peter D. Nalle)

S1861: Glebe Land indenture, 1712. A 999-year lease for Glebe Land lots to populate the town of Portsmouth and to build a meetinghouse, courthouse, almshouse, and cemetery. Signed by William Vaughan, Samuel Penhallow, John Plaisted, William Cotton, George Jaffrey, Thomas Westbrook, John Low, Richard Wibird, and John Pickering. Transcribed by Tom Hardiman. (Purchased)

S1862: Letter from Tobias Lear to Thomas Jesup, 1816. Letter from Tobias Lear at the Department of War in Washington, D.C., to Thomas S. Jesup in New Orleans regarding payment sent to Charles Wollstonecraft via Andrew Jackson. (Gift of Patricia A. Evans). ¶