

ARTIFACTS IN YOUR LIBRARY

A self-guided tour of Nahant Public Library





DELIVERY HALL



READING ROOM / CHILDREN'S ROOM



Choctaw Ball-Play Dance, George Catlin, c. 1834



Johnson Homestead, Edward Burrill, 1860



View of Nahant Hotel, c. 1855



The Midway, Bass Point, c. 1900

INTRODUCTION

Nahant Public Library has acquired a number of artworks and artifacts over the 200 years of its existence. Many of the items contribute to the story of Nahant, which has served as a fishing stop for indigenous tribes; a Quaker farming community; a vacation destination for Boston's elite; an amusement park for the middle class; a military installation; and now a quiet community of lobstermen, professionals, and retirees. The Library's holdings bear witness to much of this history, displayed in no particular order. All publicly viewable pieces are housed on the first floor. Feel free to roam from room to room and enjoy.

The building itself was built in 1895 in the "Jacobethan" style by the MIT architects Ball & Dabney of Boston. The municipal book collection itself dates to 1819, when summer resident William Wood approached his friends for books and gave them to the town, suggesting a borrowing fee of 4.5 to 9 cents to apply to buying trees and shrubs "in order that your pleasant abode may be rendred [sic] delightful by shade." After the books outgrew their place in the school and then town hall, the library's Board of Trustees (US Senator Henry Cabot Lodge, building contractor Joseph T. Wilson and building inspector Albert G. Wilson) purchased an undeveloped plot of land and held a contest to choose an architect. Their connections probably contributed to the many fine details created by Boston artisans.



TOOLS FROM NAHANT'S NATIVE AMERICAN CULTURE

Exhibit created 2010 by Daniel deStefano



WEST ENTRANCE HALL

A Native American exhibit graces much of the entry hall. The Massachusetts tribe used Nahant as a fishing encampment, and many of the tools, found in and around Nahant, relate to net fishing, hunting, planting, and food preparation. Given to the Library in 1925, the Herbert Foster Otis collection languished in its dark display case for decades until Librarian Daniel deStefano separated the local items and prepared the current exhibit in 2010. They document the presence of indigenous Americans in Nahant as far back as 12,000 years.

The portrait prints of indigenous leaders are by portraitist Charles Bird King (1785-1862), who was commissioned by the federal government to paint the Native delegates who came to Washington to discuss treaties. The original portrait paintings were on exhibit at the Smithsonian, and incorporated as hand-colored lithographs into three volumes to document what was then thought of as the vanishing Native peoples. Additional lithographs by George Catlin (1796-1872) and Peter Rindisbacher (1806-1834) round out this collection of non-New England chiefs.

A side hall contains original watercolors of various historic Nahant homes and locales, as well as a contemporary painting of a historic “pinkie schooner,” a fishing vessel with a pointed, uplifted stern that was used along the North Shore from the 18th - 20th century. Note also the “witch’s house,” a pavilion built by Frederick Tudor over a small cave for his 19th-century tourist attraction, “Maolis Gardens.” The artist, Arthur Rotch (1850-1894), was probably of the well-known Rotch and Tilden architects, builders for high society in Boston and Lenox, MA and Bar Harbor, ME. The Witch’s House, thought to be used as a hiding place during the Salem witch trials, can still be glimpsed at the corner of Marginal Road and Ocean Street.



A Winnebago, Charles Bird King, c.1840



Pinkie Schooner, Dan Perepelitza, 2017



Witch's House, Maolis Garden, Arthur Rotch, 1872



Joseph Johnson, Frank Haynes, 1847



Betsy Graves Johnson, Frank Haynes, 1845



William Wood, c.1850

DELIVERY HALL



Glass Floors

The main hall of the library houses the circulation desk, where a librarian would scurry into the stacks to retrieve the book you asked for in this 1895 “closed stack” system. You now may browse the stacks, whose shelves were manufactured in Louisville, KY and installed here. The glass second floor would have allowed light to get down to the first floor, because even though this was Nahant’s first building built with electrical wiring, it still would have been pretty dim. (The third floor was built later.)

Several items are notable in the main hall. Note the chandeliers by Shreve, Crump & Low of Boston, the carved chairs that originated with the building, and the cypress scrollwork ceiling and fireplace detail. The large portraits of Betsy Graves Johnson and Joseph Johnson represent the first Colonial families to permanently settle here in the early 1700s: the Hoods, Breeds, and Johnsons. Their standing as Quakers would fluctuate when they began to charge lodgers, but eventually it was settled that vacationers need not be housed for free. Joseph’s second wife Betsy was raised a Puritan, had been a teacher briefly in Nahant, and bore Joseph six children to add to the eight from his first wife. A one-room school was built in 1819 to educate the children, and the first library books were housed there that same year. Library creator William Wood’s photograph, taken in later years, hangs to the left of the main door.



Nahant map, Alonzo Lewis, 1846

From those early days of farmers housing strangers, Nahant rapidly became a seaside escape from Boston. The 1846 map by Alonzo Lewis (1794-1861) points out a number of new features. Many new homes have sprung up around town, including ice exporter Frederick Tudor's estate across the "belt" of Nahant. New trees, planted to replenish what had

been removed by colonial farmers, dot the map. The Nahant Hotel (opened in 1823) is prominent on East Point, and there is a steamboat launch to ferry Boston's elite into town. Visitors to the Hotel included Longfellow, Shakespearean actress Fanny Kemble, Nathaniel Hawthorne, and Thomas Jefferson's daughter.



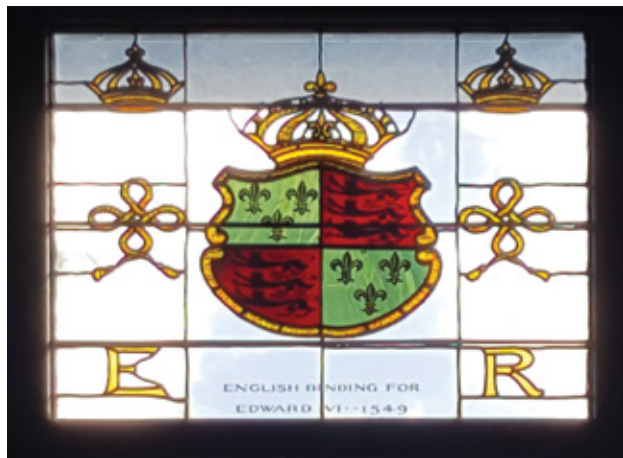
Dr. Edward Robbins home near Swallow's Cave and Steamboat Dock, c.1850

At the desk are two small paintings of Nahant shore scenes. Believed to be mid-19th century oils of unknown origin, one depicts the steamboat launch at the southern end of Nahant.



Ruins of Nahant Hotel East Point, John Amory Codman, c.1862

Look also for the John Amory Codman (1824-1886) paintings in the southeast corner. The painting of East Point (top) depicts an important moment in Nahant history: the burning down of the Nahant Hotel in 1861.



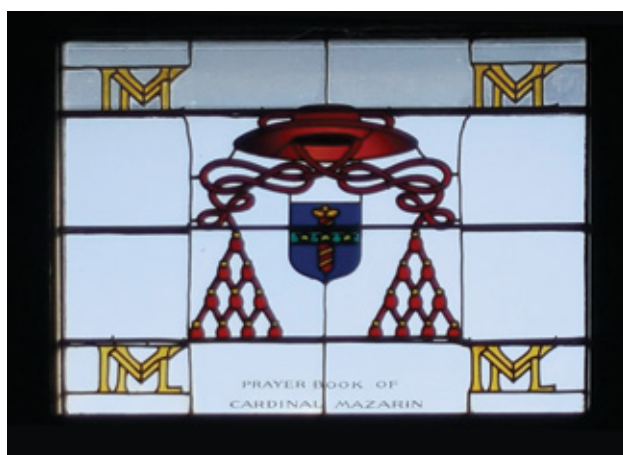
EDWARD VI, 1549



JAMES I, 1608



ELEANOR OF AUSTRIA, C.1540



CARDINAL MAZARIN, C.1643

READING ROOM / CHILDREN'S ROOM

Four stained glass windows embellish what was once the formal reading room that now serves the Library's youngest patrons. Crafted by Ford & Brooks of Boston (makers of the ceiling window at the Boston State House), each panel is related to books in some way. From top to bottom:

Edward VI – the “boy king” – under his reign, the Book of Common Prayer was first translated into English from Latin

James I – authorized the translation of the Bible now known as the King James Version

Eleanor of Austria – her husband, Francis I of France, decreed that a copy of every book printed in France be given to the royal library, which he opened to scholars

Cardinal Mazarin – his personal library, housed in his palace, was one of the foremost book collections in the world, comprising some 60,000 items by the mid-1600s. Many of his books are still in extant as part of the National Library of France.

Outside of the librarian's office, two more stained glass windows depict printer's marks from early French bookmakers, John Pruss of Strasbourg and Peter Ballet of Lyons.

Other notable details in this room include the paneling itself, made of quartered oak; the grandfather clock, donated when the building opened; and the carved Lionhead at the fireplace, whose maker is unknown but believed to be from the same workshop that carved the stonework over the main entrance: John Evans & Company of Boston.



Carved Lion Head, 1895



Grandfather Clock, 1895



Egg Rock with Lighthouse, John Erik Christian Petersen, c.1870

SELECTMEN'S OFFICE / COMPUTER ROOM

The computer room was once the Selectmen's Office, before the current town hall was built in 1912. The cubby on the east wall had once housed the town's vault, and the bookcase in the northwest wall hides a former doorway. Many paintings in this room reflect the interest of residents and visitors to have a memento of their time by the sea, and artists could make a living filling that need. The Erik Christian Petersen (1839-1874) pieces were definitely of Nahant scenes, including one of the Egg Rock lighthouse, a building now long gone. The folk artist Thomas Chambers (1808-1869) painted a scene that might have been Nahant, though he was known to paint popular places he'd never visited. The print by Demetrious Athas and the painting by Carolyn Jundzilo-Comer are contemporary works by local artists. The two expressionist works by Nahanter Norman Laliberté (1925-2021) are among the Library's most recent acquisitions, painted in 1981 and 2008. (A third "Norman," a print, is in Delivery Hall.)



Shipping off a Coast, Thomas Chambers, 1845



An Esprit de Jeunesse, Norman Laliberté, 2008



Photo of the Relay Yard, Nahant, 1909



From the Appleton-Longfellow Cottage Across the Meadow to Whitney's, Thomas Gold Appleton, c.1870



Frederick Tudor, c.1850

TOWN CLERK'S OFFICE / LOCAL HISTORY ROOM

Before you leave, be sure to visit the Local History Room, also known as the Yadoff Trustees Room. Originally the Town Clerk's office, the room today holds reference works about the Nahant area or books by local authors. The 1909 panorama photo of the Relay Yard (opposite where Johnson Elementary School is today) shows the heyday of Nahant as a tourist destination for the middle class. Spurred by easy access across a causeway and by railway or ferry, Nahant became more accessible to anyone who wanted to explore its natural beauty or ride a roller coaster.

Say hello to "Ice King" Frederick Tudor, and see small oil paintings by Thomas Gold Appleton (1812-1884), an amateur who was good friends with fellow Nahanter Henry Wadsworth Longfellow and patron to Hudson River School painter Frederick Church. We hope you enjoy your time in Nahant, and now know a bit more about its history. You can learn more at the Nahant Historical Society, and by walking around town and seeing the natural sights as others have seen them over the past 12,000 years.



Old Stone Schoolhouse, Nahant, Mass 1819-1850, A C Fernald, 1895



SPECIAL THANKS TO:

*NAHANT HISTORICAL SOCIETY,
JULIE TARMY, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR*

CHRISTOPHER R. MATHIAS

BONNIE D'ORLANDO

ROBERT WILSON

BRANDPARENTS

"Artifacts in Your Library" is brought to you with federal funds provided by the Institute of Museum and Library Services and administered by the Massachusetts Board of Library Commissioners.