

Waiting for a Gallery

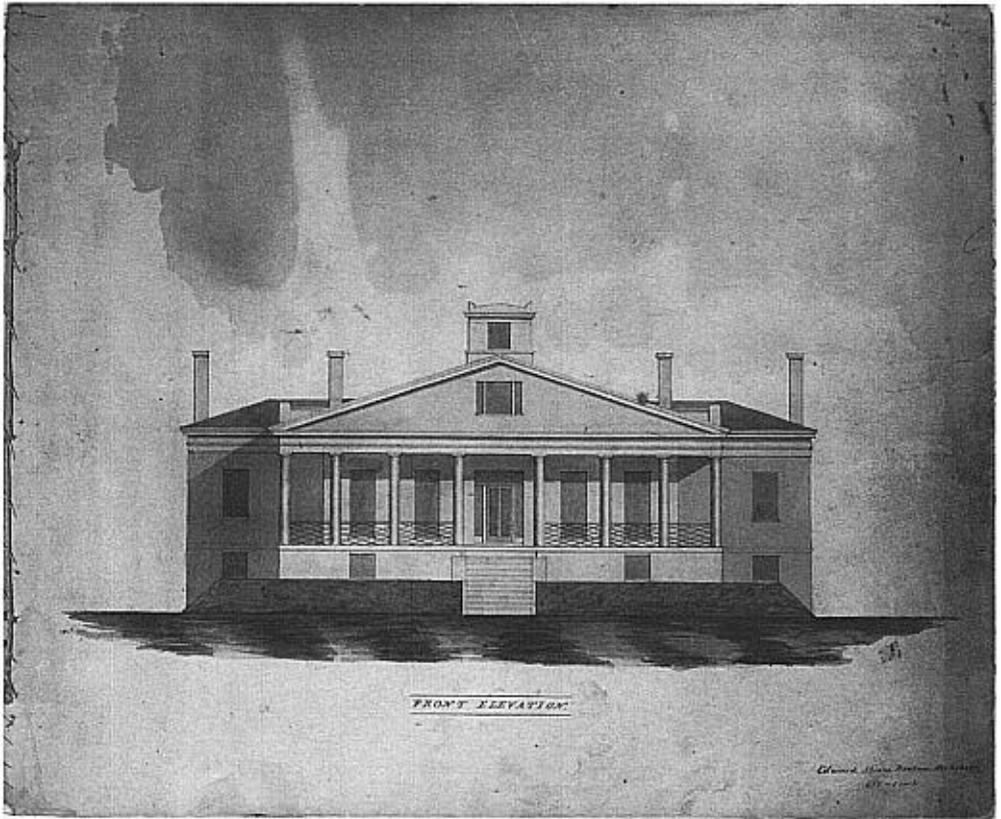
Collections objects not on view at SPNEA's historic properties spend most of their time in safe storage. Through this fall, a small but wide-ranging group of them is on exhibit at One Bowdoin Square, Boston.

Since its founding in 1910, SPNEA has collected objects and images relating to the history and material culture of New England. Today the collections comprise more than one hundred thousand objects and one million images and other primary materials documenting the region's architecture and landscape. The archival collections are housed at the Harrison Gray Otis House, and about half of the object collection is on exhibit at SPNEA's twenty-five historic house museums. A portion of the other half was on display in the building behind the Otis House and was then moved to an off-site location in the 1970s to make room for offices and programs.

The move of SPNEA administrative and development offices to nearby One Bowdoin Square in 1997 offered the Soci-

ety its first gallery space in more than a decade. To mark the event, SPNEA mounted a small exhibition of objects acquired by gift, bequest, or purchase since 1990. The exhibition covers six categories of objects—documents and samples, fine and decorative arts, photographs, architectural drawings, ephemera, and twentieth-century materials—that are both traditional and new focuses of the Society's mission and interests.

Before its centennial in 2010, SPNEA hopes to realize its long-held goal of establishing a larger exhibition space where it can share and interpret a greater portion of its rich collection. Hence the title of the One Bowdoin Square exhibition, currently on view through the fall of 1998—*Waiting for a Gallery*. In this issue, *Inside SPNEA* features a selection of these artifacts.



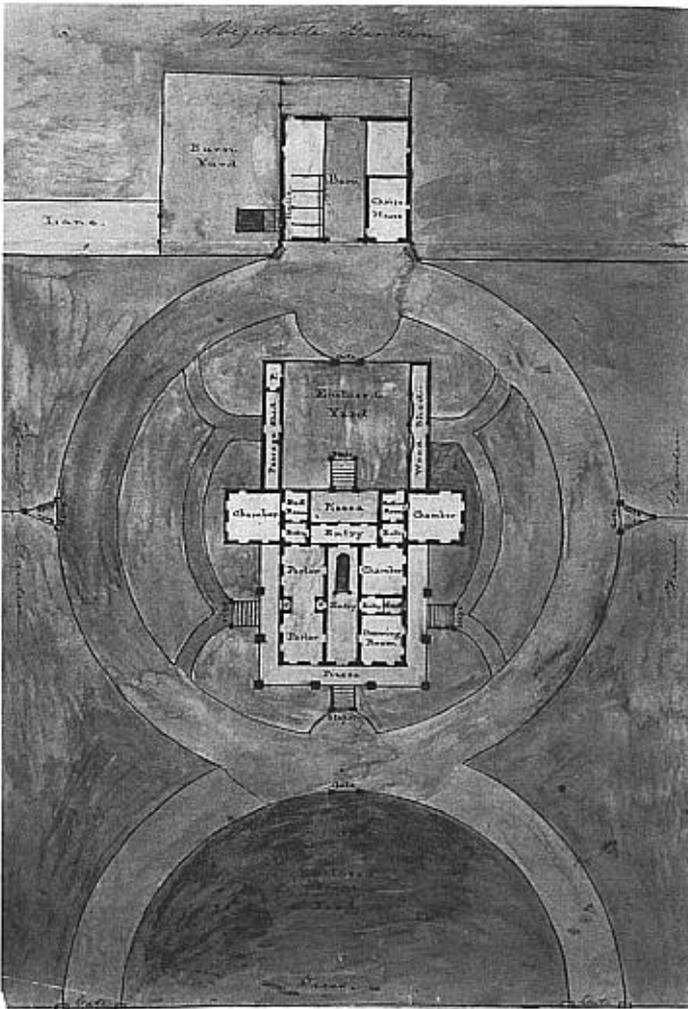
Front elevation, William W. Warren house, West Cambridge (now Arlington), Massachusetts, about 1840; drawing by Edward Shaw. Ink and watercolor on heavy paper. Gift of Earle G. Shettleworth, Jr., 1995.

After making his fortune in the West Indies trade, William W. Warren returned to his native Arlington and commissioned the architect Edward Shaw to design his “country seat” on the western shore of Spy Pond. Sited close to and facing the road to Watertown, later named Pleasant Street, the house was designed in the popular Greek Revival style with a wrap-around verandah and a floor plan that permitted cross-ventilation. These features suggest that Warren

intended to use the house as a summer residence and also may show the influence of his years in the West Indies. According to donor Earle Shettleworth, director of the Maine Historic Preservation Commission, the “southern feel” of the house and its interior plan are not typical of other structures designed by Shaw—one of which, built in 1837, still stands on Beacon Hill in Boston at 59 Mount Vernon Street.

The landscape plan for Warren’s

*Landscape plan,
William W. Warren
house, undated. Ink and
watercolor on heavy
paper. Gift of Earle G.
Shettleworth, Jr., 1995.*



property shows fruit gardens on each side of the house and a rear vegetable garden beyond the stable and carriage, or chaise, house. A real estate advertisement in the *Boston Transcript* in 1846, when Warren offered the property for sale, stated that the five-plus acres of grounds included

“a beautiful grove of forest trees on the banks of the pond, about 140 thriving young fruit trees of the choicest varieties

. . . besides grape and raspberry vines, fruit and flowering shrubs, and a kitchen and flower garden.” The Warren house was being used as a rooming house in January 1934 when it caught fire as its boarders were dining across the street. An apartment block stands on the site today.



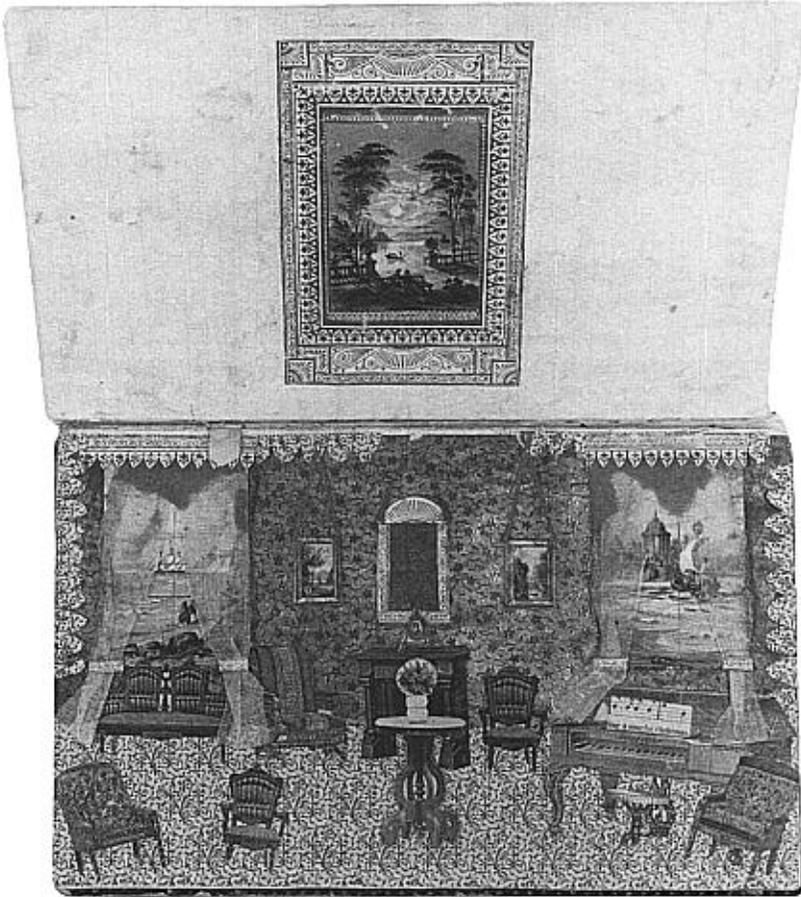
Interior of Grand Union Tea Company store, 1890s; photograph by E. A. Pierce, Waterville, Maine. Museum Purchase, 1996.

After the Civil War, the nation's first chain stores began to issue coupons, a forerunner of the Green Stamps so familiar to shoppers earlier in this century, that customers could collect and redeem for inexpensive merchandise called "premiums." In this photograph of an unidentified Grand Union Tea Company store, probably in Maine, pottery and glassware premiums are displayed along the wall at right. Retailers/wholesalers seized upon premiums as a way to encourage return shopping, as tea store wares tended to be offered at relatively high prices.



The Bermuda Triangle at Paragon Park, Hull, Massachusetts, 1985; photograph by Robert Severy. Gift of Robert Severy, 1991.

Since the 1960s, Robert Severy of Weymouth, Massachusetts, has been documenting the rapidly changing landscape of New England. The SPNEA Library and Archives contains more than thirty-seven thousand of his photographs. Severy photographed this view of Paragon Park just prior to its demolition in 1985; the amusement park had been a popular destination for New Englanders since 1905. Severy has also compiled visual records of, among other things, fire stations, barns, and mom-and-pop stores. While many images exist in SPNEA's collection that document nineteenth-century New England, Severy's views are among a relatively small number that systematically document the modern-day region.



*Dollhouse book,
Malden,
Massachusetts,
1879. Museum
purchase, 1995.*

Purchased in a New Hampshire antique shop, this scrapbook is identified by the cover inscriptions, "Carrie G. Ayres, Maplewood," indicating a section of Malden, and "from Momma/Sept. 9th 1879." The scrapbook shows pages of interiors with furnishings cut from magazines and mail-order catalogs. It proceeds from a view of the front garden through the entire house, including the kitchen, and even into the stables. Pockets identified by room on the back cover held additional furnishings and the

occupants of the house. Carrie Ayres's scrapbook is one of some five thousand pieces of ephemera, items generally produced for short-term use and often meant to be discarded, in the Society's collection. In addition to scrapbooks, the ephemera collection includes trade cards, product catalogs, advertising brochures, illustrated billheads, menus, greeting cards, theater programs, tickets, and other printed or handwritten items.



Brownie uniform, 1945–50; National Equipment Service Company, New York. Cotton. Gift of Mary Eliza Kimball, Helen Chase Kimball-Brooke, and Elmira Lee Kimball Byron, 1990.

Founded in 1912, the Brownies were established for seven- and eight-year-old girls as preparation for the day when they would “fly up” to become Girl Scouts. Between 1950 and 1956 three sisters, Mary Eliza, Helen Chase, and Elmira Lee Kimball, wore this uniform, with the signature embroidered brownie on its left breast pocket. In 1993 the sisters donated the felt Brownie cap to SPNEA as well.



Shoes, 1945–55; Charles Sumner, Boston, Massachusetts. Black velvet with rhinestones. Gift of Sara G. Withington, 1990.

Eleanor J. Whittier, the mother of the donor, bought these black velvet shoes from the shop of Charles Sumner at 16 Newbury Street. Opened for business in 1945, Sumner’s shop was a relatively new addition to Newbury Street when Whittier bought the shoes, and until its closing in 1996 it sold fine women’s apparel on the most fashionable block of Boston’s most fashionable street. The heels, paved in rhinestones, indicate that the shoes were meant to be worn on formal occasions. The shoes were given to SPNEA with their original box.



*Wallpaper sample, 1780–90; France.
Block-printed on handmade paper. Gift of
Wentworth-Gardner & Tobias Lear Houses
Association, 1992.*

This wallpaper was found pasted over an earlier and much less fashionable English wallpaper in a bedchamber closet of the Tobias Lear House in Portsmouth, New Hampshire. Birthplace and home of George Washington's private secretary, the house is thought to have been built by Lear's grandfather, also named Tobias, about 1740. Washington visited the Hunking Street house in 1789, four years after Lear became his secretary, and the French paper dates from the same decade. The paper is an example of the earliest types of French wallpapers to be used in New England and features a pattern heretofore unrepresented in SPNEA's extensive wallpaper collection. In some places the paper's ground color has worn away to reveal that it was printed on proof sheets left over from printing a book.



Side chair, 1897–1900; Heywood-Wakefield Company, Gardner, Massachusetts. Wicker with printed velvet upholstery. Museum Purchase, 1992.

This chair is part of a suite of wicker furniture, including a settee and a rocker, that furnished the front parlor of the Medfield home of Henry J. and Cora Emerson Laverty. Henry Laverty (1871–1972) managed a horse farm in Shoreham, Vermont, before moving to Medfield about 1895 to superintend another horse farm and the D. D. Curtis straw hat factory, later E. V. Mitchell Company. Laverty and his wife may have purchased the set. For nearly a century the furniture remained in the unheated front parlor, probably used only in summer, of the Lavertys' Queen Anne-style home. The chair, bearing the label of premier wicker manufacturer Heywood-Wakefield Company, is rococo in style and retains what is probably its original upholstery, a pattern velvet tufted with cording. Wicker was used to furnish interiors as well as outdoor spaces, but most wicker furniture in SPNEA's collection had seen service on porches and bears the effect of long exposure to the elements. The Laverty furniture, accompanied by a wicker pedestal center table probably not part of the suite but always used with it, is unusual for its excellent condition and its detailed history of use.



Landscape with Two Fishermen, 1827; *Thomas Doughty*. Oil on canvas. Bequest of Susan Norton, 1990.

Born in Philadelphia and trained as a tanner, Thomas Doughty (1793–1856) was one of the first American artists to devote himself exclusively to landscape painting. Doughty, virtually untrained as an artist, exhibited his first landscape at the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts in 1816 and gave up the tanning business altogether in 1820. In 1828 Doughty moved from Philadelphia to Boston, began the study of lithography, and

opened a drawing school; though he returned to Philadelphia in 1830, Doughty was back in Boston in 1832 and taught drawing and painting in the city until 1837. Josiah Wolcott (see Nancy Osgood’s article on Wolcott in this issue) was one of his students. This painting, inscribed “Doughty 1827,” was one of a pair owned originally by Andrews and Catherine Norton, parents of Harvard’s noted art professor Charles Eliot Norton.



Bust of Diana, 1870–80; probably Boston. Marble. Gift in memory of Charlotte Lyman Clark and Benjamin Schuyler Clark by their children, 1997.



Diana bust in Lyman home, 16 Mount Vernon Street, Boston, 1886; photograph by A. H. Folsom. Gift in memory of Charlotte Lyman Clark and Benjamin Schuyler Clark by their children, 1997.

This bust stood on a cabinet in the Boston parlor of Arthur and Ella Lyman. Photographs show the bust on display at the couple's Mount Vernon Street home before 1886, when they moved permanently to the Vale, the family's summer residence in Waltham. In 1952 the Lyman family donated this estate, built in 1793 by China trade merchant Theodore Lyman (1753–1839), to SPNEA and over the years have enriched this gift with further donations of objects used in both houses and of photographs documenting their interiors.

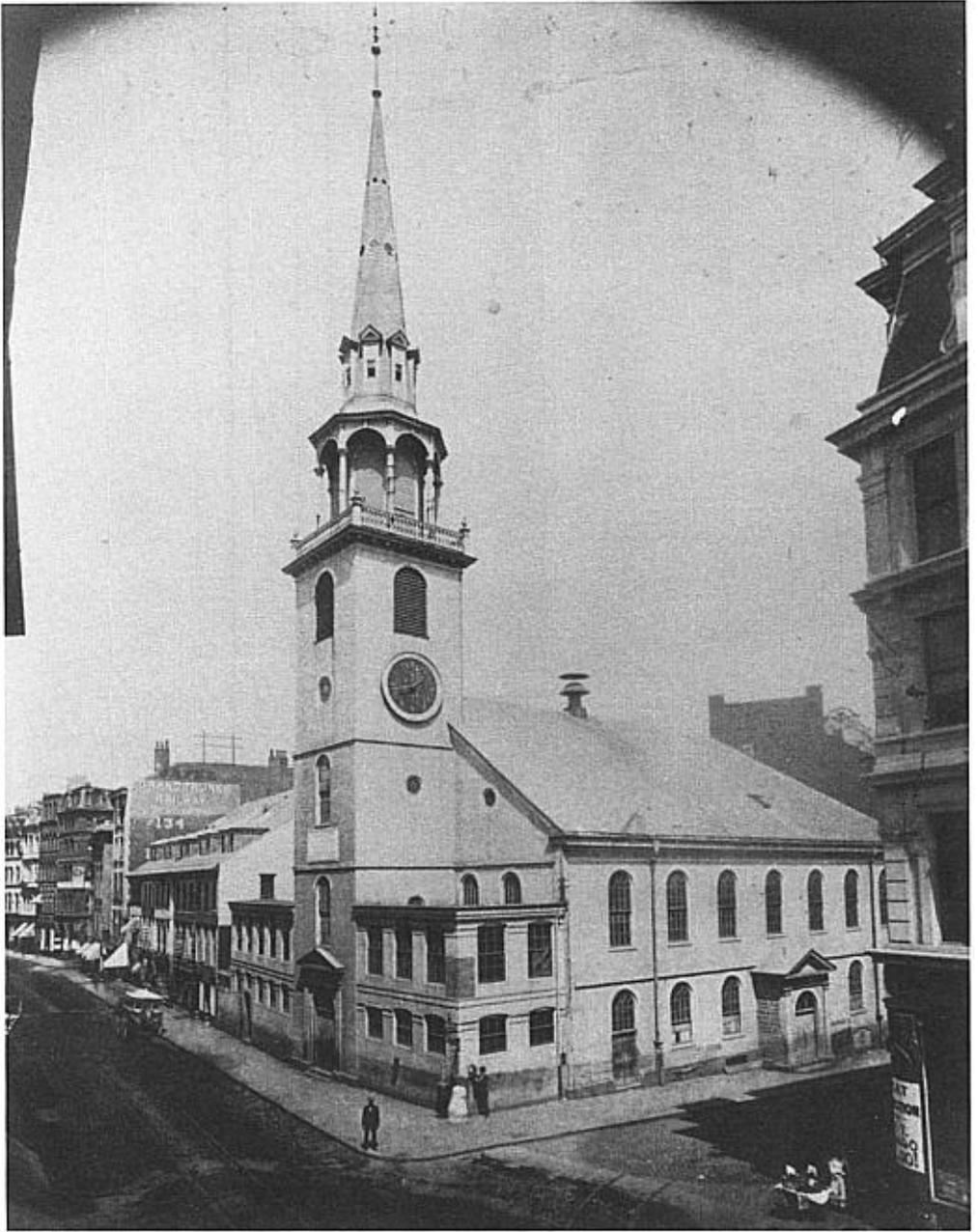


Fig. 1. After a deeply divided congregation decided to move to the fashionable Back Bay, the Old South Meetinghouse was put to temporary use as a post office in 1873. Photograph courtesy SPNEA Library and Archives.