

Linking the Present with the Past

The Historic Artifacts Room Exhibits



Natural History Museum, 1889, Baldwin Coolidge, photographer

The Grand Opening of the Woburn Public Library Woburn, Massachusetts

March 15-16, 2019

Self-Guided Tour

Introduction

Welcome to the Historic Artifacts Room. Also known as the Octagon Room, this space was planned by Henry Hobson Richardson, the Library's architect for the 1879 building, as the site for a museum to house Library Trustee John Cummings' Natural History Collection, which he intended to donate to the Library. In 1885, before the Cummings collection was donated, this room was set up as the Ladies' Reading Room to make use of the unoccupied space. There were silk curtains for the upper windows, heavy fabric draped at the entrance, a large oak table at the center, and comfortable chairs throughout. That oak table is now located in the art gallery, and some of the original furniture is still in the Library.

When the Cummings collection was donated to the Library in 1888, the Natural History Museum was set up using the cases you see here today, built by Woburn house builder George E. Fowle. Two photographs taken in 1889 by Baldwin Coolidge show the room as it looked at the time. It was a popular museum that had many visitors over the 27 years it remained in this location while it continued its alternate use as a reading room. By the early 1900s, though, the Library had become crowded, and as part of a modernization plan the Children's Room was moved into the Octagon Room in 1916.

At that time the seven exhibit cases (one for each wall of the Octagon) were taken apart and moved to the third-floor attic, where the natural history collection was displayed in a new museum. The historical artifacts collected by the Library since its inception, and displayed in the basement and in various rooms on the second floor, were also moved to the attic over time, eventually becoming the focus of the Library museum. A museum remained on the third floor for 101 years, until the library was closed in 2017 for the Library building project.

With the restoration of the Richardson Library as part of the project, and with the support of the Library's Trustees, we have brought the original cases back to the Octagon and added lights to them so we can once again exhibit many of the artifacts of Woburn's past from the attic museum. We are excited to be able to make these collections accessible to our Library patrons in their original location. The museum objects have been placed in their historical context. Photographs, documents, and artwork from the

Glennon Archives collections – reproductions as well as originals – accompany the objects. Beginning on the left and continuing clockwise, the exhibition follows a timeline, highlighting significant events in the history of Woburn from the first settlement in 1640 to the early 1900s.

Case A: Settlement of Woburn, Domestic Industries and Historic Houses

We begin our tour of the exhibits with the settlement of Woburn in 1640. The first document to establish the Town of Woburn, signed by the original settlers of the town, is known as “The Town Orders.” A reproduction of the document (the original is held by the City of Woburn) is displayed. Captain Edward Johnson, one of the original settlers of Woburn, wrote what is considered to be the first published work on New England, known to scholars as “Wonder Working Providence of Sion’s Saviour.” The Library owns a first edition of the book, printed in London in 1654, and a copy of the title page is shown here.

The Ordination of Thomas Carter is Woburn resident Albert Thompson’s most famous painting. Before attempting his large painting he created the small study painting in oil exhibited here. Local Woburn people were said to be Thompson’s models for the historical characters depicted in the scene. A label identifies each historical personage.

This exhibit includes a few objects related to the early history of Woburn. The first is a jury box used in Woburn in the 18th and early 19th centuries. The second is a watchman’s rattle used to warn off intruders as the watchman made his rounds in town. The third is a tithing rod. While this particular tithing rod came from Ipswich, similar rods would have been carried in Woburn by tithing men appointed by the town to maintain order in the church and community.

On the top shelf of this case is a print of Albert Thompson’s historical painting, titled *First Meeting House in Woburn, 1642*. He painted it in 1896. The location of the first meetinghouse is today the Woburn Common. On the same shelf is an early map of New England, attributed to William Hubbard and dated 1677. Woburn is visible at the center left of the map.

The first inhabitants of Woburn were Native Americans. Archaeological specimens collected in Woburn, displayed on the bottom shelf, attest to the long occupation of the area by indigenous peoples over several thousand years.

Prior to the industrial revolution, in the 17th, 18th and early 19th centuries, much of the work in Woburn was done in the home. On the second shelf are examples of tools from domestic industries, passed down through Woburn families. The textile industry is well represented, with shears for shearing sheep, cards for preparing fiber for spinning, a tape loom, and a page from an account book detailing transactions for a community loom in West Woburn. Also displayed are a carpenter's adze and plane and a wheelwright's tool.

Woburn has many historic homes. Here we focus on the history of two: the 1670 Simonds-Cutler House and the 1824 Reverend Joseph Bennett House. Photographs, a painting, and artifacts from the Simonds-Cutler House help tell the story of this first period home. The Library owns the original diamond pane window from the home, visible in the painting of the house displayed above the case. This window is truly rare, one of only 15-20 of these early colonial period windows still extant in New England. This window, which was in fragile condition, is receiving conservation treatment, as described by the label on the top shelf, and will be displayed above the case when the work is complete. Above the case is a watercolor painting of the William Symonds House as it appeared in the 17th century. The Reverend Joseph Bennett House, originally located across Pleasant Street from the Library, was moved in the late 19th century to make way for new development. An early lock and a door scraper from the home, removed and donated by the owners, help to tell the story of this house, which still survives today in its new location.

Case B: Colonial Kitchen

The artifacts in the Colonial Kitchen exhibit were among the first collected by the Library. They include many objects used in early kitchens in Woburn from the 17th through early 19th centuries. There are cast iron pots, pewter dishes and basins, woodenware, candle molds and stands, and many other types of kitchen implements, all given by Woburn residents and each identified by their source (if known), along with a commentary on their function. Of particular note is the brown ash wood splint basket on the top shelf. While from a later period, it is a fine example of an apple-picking basket, a type of basket that dates back to the Colonial period. Created by Mr. Timothy Andrews in 1850, all of the materials used in making the basket were gathered in Woburn. A detailed history of the Library's Colonial Kitchen can be found at the back of this booklet.

**Case C: Revolutionary War, French and Indian War,
Middlesex Canal and Boston and Lowell Railroad**

Woburn played an important role during the Revolutionary War, from the first shots fired at the Battle of Lexington and Concord in April 1775 to the removal of British troops from Charlestown and Savannah in late 1782. In this case, original artifacts from the conflict, collected by Woburn soldiers and town residents, are exhibited. They include a cannonball believed to be from the Battle of Lexington and Concord, a badge of the King's Own Royal Regiment collected after the battle, Job Miller's masterfully carved powder horn, and weapons from the Elijah Richardson Collection. A painting of Albert Thompson, *Alarm at Lexington*, hanging above the case depicts a scene at the home of Captain Jesse Wyman on April 19, 1875 as he readies to leave for the battle.

The two best-known Woburn natives of the Revolutionary War period are Colonel Loammi Baldwin and Benjamin Thompson (Count Rumford). The former was a commander of Woburn troops who went on to become a staff officer under General George Washington. The latter was a loyalist and a British spy who later became a famous scientist and was named Count of the Holy Roman Empire for his work in Bavaria. Boyhood friends, the two men ended up on opposite sides in the war. This case includes a town order payable to Loammi Baldwin for the purchase of shirts for troops in the Continental Army and a painting on plaster of Count Rumford. An oil painting of Rumford, by Woburn native Edwin G. Champney, can also be seen hanging above the case. Relics from the French and Indian War, in which Woburn soldiers fought, are also on display.

The Middlesex Canal was a major engineering achievement of the late 18th through early 19th century. Above the case hangs an Albert Thompson painting, entitled *More Wind Than Rain* or *Woburn Meadows*, depicts a scene near the canal behind the Woburn Public Library. Original artifacts from the construction of the canal are displayed including a shovel and spade used in digging the canal. Also featured are Louis Linscott prints showing scenes of the canal, an original painting of the Horn Pond Locks, and photographs showing sections of the canal after it was abandoned. In the 1830s the Boston and Lowell Railroad was built alongside the canal route, causing the canal to go into decline and finally to shut down. Photographs and artifacts document the role of the railroad in Woburn in the 19th century.

Case D: Taverns and Temperance

Shoemaking, Tanneries, Businesses and Farms

The first tavern in Woburn, the Ark Tavern, was built in 1675. For roughly the next 165 years, taverns were a popular place for travelers and town residents to meet, drink, and discuss the topics of the day. This exhibit features photographs of famous Woburn taverns and original tavern-related objects including cider mugs, a flip glass, a toddy stick, and a loggerhead (for stirring flip) from Ichabod Parker's tavern. A rare early pewter mug, attributed to Nathaniel Austin, a pewterer from Charlestown, is a highlight of this case. Images of two iconic Woburn taverns, the Ark Tavern and the Joseph Winn Tavern, taken by Woburn photographers Henry P. Harrington and Charles Taylor, are shown here.

The temperance movement developed nationally as a reaction to the drinking culture that was a part of daily life at the time. In Woburn it began in 1828 with the organization of the Woburn Association for the Promotion of Temperance. The movement was in direct opposition to the taverns and later the saloons that operated in town. A temperance medal, a hymn, broadsides, and other ephemera document the local temperance movement. Two large temperance banners have been conserved and reproductions were printed on fabric for the exhibit. Although too large to fit in the cases, the banners are on display on the mezzanine in front of the Glennon Archives along with a description of their conservation.

Shoemaking was an important early industry in Woburn. What began as work that took place in the home eventually grew to become an important industry in town, with 22 shoe shops operating in Woburn in 1798. On exhibit are a pair of brocade wedding shoes made by Josiah Leathe, a Woburn cordwainer (shoemaker) for his wife, Mary A. Leathe, to wear on their wedding day in 1845, shoemaker's tools, and illustrations of a shoe factory and shoe store in Woburn.

Francis Wyman operated one of the earliest tanneries in Woburn in Central Square. However, it wasn't until the 19th century that tanneries would surpass shoemaking as the leading industry in town. By 1814 there were 21 separate currying and tanning establishments operating in Woburn. The industry would continue to grow throughout the 19th century. Many of the town's most prominent citizens earned their fortunes in the leather industry, including early Library donor Jonathan B. Winn, whose portrait is hung above the case on the left. Photographs of some of Woburn's many tanneries, including the Dow tannery, the W.P. Fox tannery, and the Ebenezer N. Blake tannery, appear in the exhibit.

Machine shops developed in Woburn to supply equipment for the leather industry. The Woburn Machine Company and the Buel Machine Company were two local firms that served this function. The latter company had a long tenure, continuing under family management through 1979. Photographs, a leather gauge, and souvenir items from the two companies are on display.

Woburn was the home of an early, short-lived automotive manufacturing company, the Walker-Johnson Truck Company. In operation from 1919 to 1926, the company supplied trucks to companies throughout New England and beyond. Photographs in company scrapbooks held in the Glennon Archives highlight the trucks built by this little-known local manufacturer.

Woburn Center has been home to many small businesses throughout its history. During the 19th century, Main Street was a busy commercial district where many different types of retail businesses thrived. In this exhibit three businesses are profiled. One lasted but a short time, one moved west to California, and one is still in business today. One lasted but a short time, the second moved west to California, and the third is still in business today. They are William A. Haslam, Practical Hatter, Cyrus Tay and Co. and the S.B. Goddard and Son Co. For each business an object helps tell its story.

Woburn was once an agricultural community that was home to many farms. Over time, as more people moved into the area, the types of farms changed from small family farms to larger farms that employed more people. Tools used on the farm and photographs record this important part of Woburn's history.

Case E: Civil War

Woburn men enlisted in the Union Army soon after hostilities broke out at Fort Sumter on April 12, 1861. Eventually three companies would be formed in Woburn: the 5th Massachusetts Regiment, Company G (Woburn Mechanic Phalanx); the 22nd Massachusetts Regiment, Company F (Woburn Union Guard); and the 39th Regiment, Company K (Woburn National Rangers). Woburn residents who enlisted elsewhere also served in other Union regiments.

The exhibit showcases original objects used in the field by Woburn soldiers who served in the war, from hardtack to bayonets; from canteens to muskets and swords. Captain John E. Tidd, who first enlisted as a private in Company "A" of the 5th Regiment Massachusetts and retired as a captain, collected a number of

objects that speak to the everyday life of a Civil War soldier. These include: a mug, a coffee pot, a sewing kit, pipe, a prayer book and a portable writing desk.

William H. LeBaron enlisted at age 17 and served for three years with the 39th Regiment, Company K. His collection includes objects he used in the field such as his musket, bayonet, armament belt, cartridge box, cap box and canteen.

Edwin Graves Champney enlisted in September 1862 as a 19-year-old private - in the 5th Massachusetts Regiment, Company G and served for two years. He was an artist who recorded his observations of Army life in sketch books, including scenes drawn from his experience during the eight months he served in eastern North Carolina. Three of his sketches are on display in the exhibit.

Case F: The Civil War and G.A.R. Woburn Fire Department.

The Civil War drew to a close when Robert E. Lee surrendered to General Ulysses S. Grant following the Battle of Appomattox Court House on April 9, 1865. In total, 775 Woburn men served in the military during the Civil War, and at least 82 were killed. Prominent among those who lost their lives was Captain Samuel I. Thompson, who was Commander of the Woburn Union Guard, Company F, 22nd Massachusetts Regiment. Captain Thompson was wounded at the Battle of Malvern Hill on July 1, 1862. After spending time in the infamous Libby prison in Richmond, Virginia, he was released but died of his wounds in a Union hospital in Baltimore. His lap desk is on display. Other prominent Woburn soldiers who died were Major Elisha Burbank of the 12th Massachusetts Regiment and Sergeant Charles Merriam of the 22nd Massachusetts Regiment, Company F (Woburn Union Guard). Their photographs are also displayed.

The people of Woburn commemorated their fallen heroes of the Civil War with the Soldiers' Monument, dedicated at the Woburn Common on Oct. 14, 1869, with thousands of people in attendance. A photograph of the event, thought to be by Woburn photographer Charles H. Taylor, documents this event.

A major blow to the entire nation was the death of President Abraham Lincoln, who was killed by an assassin's bullet at Ford's Theatre in Washington, DC, on April 14, 1865. Many turned out for a local observance of his funeral in Woburn. An etching of President Lincoln, a print of a Woburn newspaper of the time, and a

piece of the greatcoat worn by President Lincoln on the night of his death are included in the exhibit. The coat fragment was given to the donor, A.C. Floyd, a Woburn resident who worked in Washington DC, by R.S. Todd, the nephew of Lincoln's widow, Mary Todd Lincoln.

In 1867, soon after the end of the Civil War, the first G.A.R. post in Woburn, Burbank Post 33, G.A.R., was formed. A local branch of the national organization of Civil War veterans, the local G.A.R. posts played an important part in the life of veterans in town. Along with a place to meet and congregate, the posts provided an identity for their members and public recognition for the veterans' service when G.A.R. posts took part in important civic events in town. A second post, Post 161, G.A.R. was later formed in 1884. G.A.R. artifacts in the exhibit include Grand Army buttons, a pin, and ceremonial swords from the two Woburn G.A.R. posts. Photographs and ephemera also document the two posts.

The Woburn Fire Department was formed in 1829 with the purchase of the first fire engine. Before that time, private citizens were responsible for putting out fires themselves with buckets, under the supervision of fire wardens. The Fire Department was organized by the town more officially in 1850 and progress was made going forward in purchasing equipment and hiring personnel. The exhibit features a ceremonial engraved fireman's horn, an early fire bucket, fire helmets, belts and a fire company ballot box. Photographs document several early Woburn fire companies and their firemen, including Niagara Engine Company No. 1, Gilcreast Hook and Ladder No. 1, John Cummings Hose Company No. 3, and Highland Hose Company No. 5. Images of some of the fire chiefs who led the department and of catastrophic fires in Woburn are displayed. Highlights of this exhibit are an original portrait on tin of Jacob Webster and replicas of the founding documents of two early volunteer fire companies, Fountain Engine Company No. 1, and Albion Engine Company No. 1, from the Glennon Archives.

Case G: Woburn Police Department, Admiral Parks and World War I Recreation, Woburn Bands and Woburn People

Although it was settled in 1640, Woburn had no police department for nearly 200 years. The coming of the railroad and a population surge in the mid-1800s inspired Woburn officials to found the police department. By 1851, town records show Joseph B. Stowers being paid for “police services.” He may have been Woburn’s first police officer. By 1855, the department consisted of ten men – all part-time officers who reported to the Board of Selectmen for their assignments. The first mention of a Chief of Police is in the Town Records in 1861.

The first uniform of the Department consisted of long outer coats, a badge on the left chest, and British bobby-type helmets. A highlight of this exhibit is Police Chief William McCauley’s bobby helmet. Chief McCauley was appointed in 1921 and held the position until 1950 when he retired, serving as Chief during the years of Prohibition, the Great Depression, and the Second World War. Also displayed are an early 19th century policeman’s hook, a group photograph of Woburn policemen from 1912, and the rules and regulations for the department.

Charles Wellman Parks was born in Woburn on March 22, 1863. A graduate of Woburn High School in the class of 1879, he enlisted as a commissioned civil engineer, at the rank of ensign, with the United States Navy on July 19, 1897, and served in the Bureau of Yards and Docks during the Spanish-American War in 1898. He was promoted through grades, reaching the rank of Rear Admiral on January 11, 1918. On exhibit are his sword, bicorn hat, medals and other objects related to his service. The desk of Admiral Parks can also be seen on the first floor of the new Library building, near the stairs.

More than 1300 individuals from Woburn served in the military during World War I, and 34 did not return home. Many others were wounded, and some carried the memories of their wartime experiences with them for the rest of their lives. One of those who served was Private Leo McKinnon, who was awarded a silver star for gallantry in action, which is on exhibit. After the war McKinnon went on to work for 35 years in the Woburn school system, retiring as principal of the Woburn Junior High School in 1961. The exhibit includes a panoramic photographic of Woburn WW1 soldiers, an image of the WW1 monument on the Common, and a

German WW1 machine gun and German military spiked helmet from the early 1900s.

Horn Pond has been a popular spot for recreation in Woburn through the years, in all seasons. A pair of 18th-century snowshoes, a pair of 19th-century ice skates, and an early 20th-century sled offer a glance back at winter recreation in Woburn of past years. The recreational use of Horn Pond has changed over the centuries. During the era of the Middlesex Canal, Horn Pond Island served as a popular destination for pleasure seekers who could travel to the pond by canal boat, tour the pond by sailboat, and stop at Horn Pond Island with its hotel and bowling alley. Later in the 19th century the Pond became popular for canoeing, and the Innitou Canoe Club had a boathouse there. In the exhibit are images of Horn Pond including a bird's-eye view from 1883, postcards of canoeing on the Pond, a photograph of the Innitou Canoe Club, and scrapbook pages from canoe club meets. Above the case hangs a painting, *Horn Pond, Looking Southwest*, created in January 1849. It is believed to have been painted by Woburnite Freeman Richardson.

The first band in Woburn was the Woburn Marion Band, which was organized in 1841. Among the other bands that followed were the Woburn Brass Band, organized in 1878, and the Woburn City Band, which performed from 1927 to 1935. This rich musical history is illustrated by a trumpet, a shako (cylindrical band hat), band caps, and photographs and histories of different Woburn bands.

The section on Woburn people focuses on interesting people from Woburn's past accompanied by a photograph or artifact from their lives.

Curator's Note

The work of many other people made it possible for me to select and organize these exhibits and make them available to the public. Among them: Library Director Emeritus Kathleen O'Doherty for her stewardship of the museum collection over the years as Library Director and for the idea to bring the Fowle museum cases back down to the Octagon for a new life in the Historic Artifacts Room; former Library Director Andrea Bunker for her enthusiasm and gentle encouragement of my efforts; former Archivist Colleen Previte for her extensive work in cataloging and acquiring museum objects; Archives Assistant Sue Ellen Holland, who curated the section on Woburn farms and contributed to other

sections as well; WPL colleagues Tracy Breeden and Gregg Bouley for help with labels and research, respectively; Linda and David Olsson, Archives Volunteers, for yeoman assistance with mounting the exhibit on a fairly tight timeline; my wife, Lisa Appleton, for her diligent editorial work; and the late John D. McElhiney, whose love of history and deep knowledge of Woburn as reflected in his book, *Woburn: A Past Observed*, were a source of both information and inspiration for these exhibits.

Tom Doyle, March 2019