

Allure of the Mountains

In hard times for regional history museums, with closings threatened or in progress in states including New Jersey, Pennsylvania, North Carolina and Arizona, an institution with a relatively thrifty six-figure budget has sprung up on the Plymouth State University campus in New Hampshire.

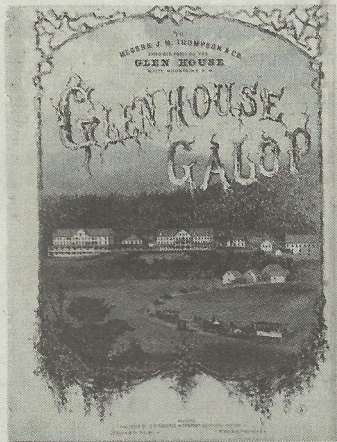
The Museum of the White Mountains opens on Feb. 23 in a converted 1940s Methodist brick church, stocked with recent gifts, including specially commissioned hotel sheet music and landscape paintings by women.

The debut show, "Passing Through: The Allure of the White Mountains," reveals how 19th-century tourism evolved from horse teams dragging luggage along treacherous paths to train trips and genteel inns like the Tip-Top House.

"It's such a quantum leap, that fascinates me," said Catherine S. Amidon, the museum director.

The exhibition catalog, published by the museum, quotes the awed recollections of the early hikers. "My head spun round with trying to imagine the lives these mountains led," Louisa May Alcott wrote after an 1861 trip to Mount Washington.

Ms. Amidon envisions the museum becoming part of a culture and history trail. The New Hampshire Historical Society in Concord has an exhibit opening Saturday on the state's female artists. The New England Ski Museum in Franconia has brought out artifacts related to the region's chairlift innovators, Olympic medalists and World War II mountaineers who skied through Italy.



PRIVATE COLLECTION, MUSEUM OF THE WHITE MOUNTAINS