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New Plymouth museum to serve host of purposes from library and gallery to tourism resource



It's not specifically an art gallery. It's not a tourism bureau. It's not a library - it's all of these things and more, officials behind the new Museum of the White Mountains hope.

Set to open Saturday, Feb. 23, within in a former church on Highland Street at Plymouth State University, the site is designed as a gateway to the region, a place that celebrates the history, culture, environment and beauty of the White Mountains.

PSU President Sara Jayne Steen said the MWM is a natural extension of the University's mission in promoting not only education but the area. She said the museum will bring together art, history, literature, science, tourism and other approaches to create a transdisciplinary understanding of the this section of the Granite State.

PSU purchased the 1940s brick building, once home to the Unitarian Church, as the future location of the Museum of the White Mountains in 2010. The first phase of renovation works was to transform it into an exhibition gallery as well as a collections storage space and research facility.

"The museum is not just a place; it is a gateway to experience," said the museum's director, Catherine Amidon. "It is a site to share knowledge, sublime experience and personal connection. The educational experience starts outside from the growing interpretive trail that leads visitors into the museum. They are then encouraged to venture into the region with GPS coordinates that connect displays and culturally significant sites."

Meanwhile, presentations, exhibitions and programs for researchers, students and the public in the works, and an inaugural exhibition titled "Passing Through: The Allure of the White Mountains" will be on view. The display features images, interpretive panels, films and interactive technologies that curators hope will entice visitors to consider changing notions about why the White Mountains matter - "How did new modes of travel alter connections with nature?" "Do they make a difference in our understanding of human interaction with nature?" What motivates people to return?"



ON VIEW: This picturesque scene, titled "At the White Mountains," by Frederick Gleason, is on view at the new Museum of the White Mountains, courtesy of the New Hampshire Historical Society.

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The exhibit will focus on five areas - Crawford Notch, Mount Washington Valley (eastern slopes), the Summit of Mount Washington, the Northern Presidentials and Franconia Notch.

Expanding the Vision

A South Natick, Mass., couple has donated a 6,000-volume collection of White Mountains-related books, maps and historical material to the museum in advance of the site's unveiling later this month.

"By placing our collection at PSU's Museum of the White Mountains, this resource will receive the curatorial attention it deserves and will now be available in perpetuity to scholars, researchers, students and interested members of the public," said John W. "Jack" and Anne H. Newton, who gifted the collection. "It is our hope that others will make similar donations in the future to augment the Museum's research resources and to keep the collection current."

"Jack and Anne's generosity will assure the treasure they have assembled will become an invaluable resource to all who are committed to the study and preservation of the White Mountains' historical, cultural and environmental legacy, just as the Newtons are," said PSU President Sara Jayne Steen.

Over time, the museum's collections will become available digitally so visitors, so that people from near and far can enjoy the museum's offerings, including Newton's collection. The museum's director, Catherine Amidon, said Newton's donation transforms the museum into a comprehensive research site.

"First and then subsequent editions of early books and guides will afford opportunities to study not only the literature but the changes and edits over time," Amidon said. "It is Jack's dedication to collecting and his rigor in collections management that makes this collection truly special."

Diary of a Donor

Jack Newton has enjoyed a productive relationship with organizations dedicated to preserving and advocating for the White Mountains region. Newton is a life member of the Appalachian Mountain Club (AMC), serving as its treasurer and on the governing council during the 1970s. In 1976 he was chairman of the AMC's 100th Year Centennial Celebration. He also served as a trustee and treasurer of the Mount Washington Observatory for more than 15 years and remains a life trustee of that organization.

Newton first became acquainted with the White Mountains region as a college student (Dartmouth College, 1953, Tuck School, 1954). After working as a certified public accountant in Boston and later as a corporate financial officer, he stayed in New England, often visiting northern New Hampshire and in 1967 eventually acquiring an old farmhouse property in the hamlet of Lost Nation, east of Lancaster, a town in which Anne Newton's maternal ancestors were early settlers in 1816. It was during this time they started seriously collecting White Mountain material.

"This interest captivated me and led to me to form lasting friendships with many others having similar interests," Jack Newton said. "In my travels I often visited antiquarian book dealers, always on the lookout for that obscure undiscovered item that is usually only found on the dark back shelves. Today, with the advent of the internet, the whole experience of seeking and collecting has lost much of its personal charm. However, I am now looking forward to observing how this collection will be used to further the mission of the White Mountain Institute and the Museum of the White Mountains at PSU."

Not surprisingly, Newton believes his gift represents a special bond among those who treasure the White Mountains region.

"I encourage others to consider providing the MWM with similar materials that will provide a historical overview of the White Mountains from the past, in the present and into the future."

Museum hours are Tuesdays, Thursday and Fridays from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m., Wednesdays from 10 a.m. to 7 p.m. and Saturdays and Sundays from noon to 5 p.m. For details, call 535-3210 or log onto plymouth.edu/museum-of-the-white-mountains.

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